

PHILOSOPHICAL

E S S A Y S.



PHILOSOPHICAL

E S S A Y S.

I. OF THE ACADEMICAL PHILOSOPHY.

II. OF ACTIVE POWER.

III. OF LIBERTY and NECESSITY.

———*Deum namque ire per omnes
Terrasque tractusque maris, cælumque profundum. VIRG.
Jupiter est quodcunque vides, quocunque moveris. LUCAN.*

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For JOHN BALFOUR.

—————
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THE GEOGRAPHICAL

ESSAYS

I. OF THE ARABIAN PENTAGON
II. ON ACTIVE TOWNS
III. OF LANCET AND NERVOUSITY



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TO JOHN BALFOUR

1881

OF THE
ACADEMICAL PHILOSOPHY.

THE human mind is of a nature superior to any thing that falls under our immediate observation. Its essence indeed is too subtle for our comprehension; but it is distinguished by noble powers and faculties, which exert themselves in such a manner, as to render their influence and importance abundantly conspicuous. Of these faculties the understanding appears to take the lead, as it is this intellectual principle which acquaints us with the truth of things, upon which the proper exertion of the will and active power must entirely depend. The discovery of

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truth

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truth is naturally pleasing and agreeable to the mind of man. But of all truths, those must appear to be of the greatest importance, which shew us the direct road to the happiness and perfection of our nature; we have therefore the strongest interest to be cautious in our inquiries after truth, as an error or mistake may be attended with dangerous consequences.

TRUTH is the proper object of the understanding: It is this faculty which investigates and immediately discovers and perceives it; the right performance of these offices must therefore depend upon the soundness and strength of the intellectual faculty. At the same time, we know from reason, as well as from the most undoubted experience, that the heart and affections are by no means neutral in our inquiries after truth.

truth. A particular passion, or any affecting view of private interest puts the mind out of a due position, and creates a bias in the understanding. In this case, that fairness and candour which should always attend an inquirer after truth, utterly forsake us, and we exert ourselves not to discover impartially what is the truth, but what we wish and desire should be true.

INDEED, from the natural weakness of the human understanding, many truths are intirely concealed from us, and many are seen but very obscurely and imperfectly; and the different degrees of this faculty in different persons, may, in many instances, prove an occasion of a diversity in opinions.

BUT if we take an impartial view of what passes in the world, it will appear,
that,

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that, for the most part, it is the heart which is the ultimate source of error, and of all that variety and contrariety of opinions which prevail amongst mankind.

PRIDE, vanity, singularity, a passionate attachment to a particular object, warp the understanding, and corrupt the judgment, whereby the mind is diverted from the plain paths of truth, and engaged in a fruitless pursuit of some vain phantom of imagination.

STRONG prejudices have indeed such a powerful influence upon the mind, as often to determine it, even from slender and remote analogies, or an imperfect collection of facts, and some of these often ambiguous, to establish a general and peremptory conclusion. And if reasonings of this sort are embellished by an elegant

elegant and agreeable composition; and conveyed in an artful and insinuating manner, it is easy to foresee what effect they must have on those especially whose inclination or turn of thinking may give them a ready reception, and allow a small degree of probability to pass for a full demonstration.

HENCE, we may observe, that in all the different ages of the world, great parts have been no security against error; nor indeed can they be so, unless they are attended with modesty, and a sincere love of truth.

As the perception of truth, however obtained, is naturally agreeable to the mind; so, if we shall imagine, that, by the due exercise of our rational faculties, we have happily discovered any material truth, this produces an additional pleasure

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sure of a different kind. The circumstance of our being the discoverers, flatters our vanity ; we pay a high compliment to our own understanding, and expect that others will join in it. Hence, we are disposed, not to re-examine impartially the reasons of our opinion, but to exert all our skill to defend it at any rate, as an acquisition of our own, which we are very unwilling to part with. To this, we may reasonably ascribe that tenacious adherence to many false systems and hypotheses which hath so often been observed in the present, as well as in any former ages of the world.

For the same causes will produce the same effects ; and if the vanity and presumption of mankind is as great now as formerly, it will have an equal influence upon their hearts, and determine them

them to employ all their talents to maintain, with the same obstinacy, their peculiar and favourite opinions. Thus, whilst men of genius and parts, treat with scorn and contempt the prejudices and involuntary mistakes of the vulgar, which may often be more easily removed, they are, at the same time, insensible of that secret principle within their own breasts, which arms their will against the truth, and binds them fast perhaps to more dangerous errors.

As it is not necessary for our present purpose to enter into a particular consideration of the various sources of error, we shall only observe, at present, that men, either ashamed to own their ignorance, which would too much mortify the natural pride of their hearts, or, impatient of the delay of a careful examination, are commonly disposed too hastily

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ly to embrace some opinion upon any part of general science, and to form some hypothesis for the solution of any phenomenon, such as shall appear most plausible. From this rash and precipitate conduct, no good effect can be expected. And accordingly we find, that there was hardly any opinion so foolish and absurd, but what was taken up by some one or other of the antient philosophers; and obstinately maintained by them and their adherents.

REASON and experience, however, readily got the better of opinions so hastily embraced; and one system or hypothesis gave way to another, which, in its turn, was supplanted by a third, as that was also by its antagonist; for it was an easier matter to detect falsehood, than to discover truth. Thus philosophy was liable to perpetual uncertainty and change,
and

and no system could be devised, which could long maintain its ground, unless from the pure obstinacy of its abettors.

THIS state and condition of philosophy very naturally produced the following consequences: Many (reflecting upon the inconstancy and uncertainty of human opinions, and that even those opinions which were most specious, and appeared to have a solid foundation, were successively exploded and abandoned) were led into this conclusion, That there was no truth in things themselves; but that all things were tossed up and down in a giddy dance, and lost in an endless confusion; and that it was vain to expect any fixed object in nature, which the mind of man could lay hold of. Thus a door was opened for universal and absolute scepticism, which totally extinguished reason,

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and rendered the faculties of the human mind altogether insignificant and vain.

PLATO seems to have been much affected with the unhappy fate of philosophy above described, and is at particular pains to find a remedy for that dangerous scepticism to which it leads. For this purpose, he lays hold of the principles of the academical philosophy, which, in his *Phædo* particularly, he explains in a beautiful and rational manner. The general scope of his reasoning is to the following purpose: That if we are not able to discover truth, this must be owing to one of two reasons; either that there is no truth in the nature of things, or, that the mind of man, from its particular weakness and diseases, is not able to apprehend it: That, upon this last supposition, all the uncertainty and

and inconstancy of the judgments and opinions of mankind is easily accounted for; and that therefore we ought to ascribe all our errors to those diseases and disorders, which are apparent in the human mind, and not to any disease which we suppose, without reason, to be in the nature of things themselves. He observes, that truth is often of difficult access: That in order to arrive at it, we must proceed with great caution and diffidence, and carefully examine every step we take; and, after all, we shall frequently find our greatest efforts disappointed, and be obliged to sit down with the confession of our ignorance and weakness.

BUT this procedure and conduct too much opposes the natural vanity and presumption of the human mind. In search after truth, men are commonly
little

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little disposed to suspect their own faculties, and impatient of difficulty or delay, they hasten too suddenly to a conclusion.

FROM this method of proceeding, we need not be surpris'd if we fall into errors; and yet, so apt are we to be conceited of ourselves, that we throw the blame off from our own understanding, and charge nature itself with some latent disease or disorder. To prevent this bad effect, we should ascend to the cause, and there apply a proper remedy. We should, with due care, attend to the imperfection of our faculties, and keep a strong guard against the weakness of our hearts. We should examine every truth with modest diffidence and cool deliberation, and admit nothing as such, but upon the clearest evidence. If we are constant to this method, we shall indeed make slow progress

gress in knowledge; but then, we shall much seldomer fall into error, or have occasion to alter our opinion. Thus rash judgement, the great cause of scepticism, will be prevented; and the cause being removed, the effect must also cease.

THE principles of the antient academy, explained in this manner by Plato, appear to be of the utmost importance. They tend naturally to produce that modesty and caution which, in imperfect creatures, so liable to error and mistake, are peculiarly decent. Had these principles been universally cultivated, as they ought, many disputes in religion and philosophy would have been prevented; and even those who are thought to have employed the clearest and strongest reasoning upon matters of difficult and abstruse speculations, might have

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have found good reason to have hesitated and stopt short.

THOUGH Plato was very sensible of the weakness of the human understanding, and very cautious in advancing any opinion as true; yet he was at the same time equally sensible of the real distinction betwixt truth and falsehood, and that this distinction was in many instances clearly to be perceived by the human mind. His design is evidently, not to introduce scepticism, which he considers as the greatest disorder of our nature, but to furnish us with a proper antidote against it.

INDEED Plato is very ready upon most occasions to acknowledge his ignorance; but he also frequently discovers his real opinion with more or less assurance, according to the degree of evidence which
attends

attends it. With regard to the immortality of the soul, which he particularly considers in the forementioned dialogue, he is sensible that his reasonings only produce a degree of probability, and insinuates the great advantage of a divine revelation with regard to this doctrine, which, like a firm vehicle, would carry us through this journey of life with much greater comfort and security.

PLATO acted in an intire conformity with the wise principles which he had embraced; and whilst other philosophers were perpetually disputing about the abstruse nature of things, with regard to which they fell into the greatest blunders, and only exposed their own ignorance, he brought his philosophy nearer home, and chiefly applied to rectify the minds and reform the manners of mankind; in doing which his more
abstract

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abstract reasonings were corrected or supported by fact and experience; and in carrying on this excellent plan, he employed only the principles of religion, which were entirely suited to the capacities of mankind, and of which the vulgar, as well as the philosophers, might feel the influence and force.

PLATO was, on this account, justly said to have brought philosophy from heaven to earth; because, instead of employing his reasonings upon those objects which are at a distance and above our reach, he brought them home to ourselves, and applied them to much better purpose, in promoting the real happiness of men.

It may be occasionally observed, that many centuries before Plato's days, the whole spirit and substance of this excellent

lent philosophy was, by the great legislator of the Jews, comprised in the following short sentence: " Secret things
 " belong to the Lord our God; but those
 " things that are revealed belong to us,
 " and to our children for ever, that we
 " may do all the words of this law *." A sentence truly divine, though it should be supposed not to be inspired.

THE slightest reflection upon the present circumstances of human nature, must appear sufficient to justify the grounds and reasons of the modest principles of Plato. They would, however, be placed in a stronger light still, if we should enter upon any particular consideration of the objects of the human understanding; but this would lead us into a field equally boundless and perplexed. A few obser-

* Deut. chap. 29. ver. 29.

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vations, however, may not be improper.

THE mind of man is indeed active and enterprising, and will hardly allow any object whatever to be beyond the sphere of its intellectual faculty: At the same time, it sees things in a very imperfect light; yet, without adverting to this circumstance, it is apt to pronounce judgment as if its ideas were clear and complete: A very little reflection, however, must easily convince us of the rashness of such procedure.

IF we carry our minds to the highest objects of our knowledge, we shall become extremely sensible of their natural weakness and imperfection. Let us only contemplate but a very few of the divine perfections: God's manner of foreknowing future contingent events, is a thing altogether

altogether impenetrable by us, in so much that, for that reason, many deny it altogether: But in so doing, as they open a door for the greatest absurdities, so they reduce the divine to the poor standard of the human understanding; and because we can only know future events from the necessary connection of cause and effect, they will not allow God to be possessed of a different, and infinitely more perfect manner of knowledge. Such reasoning certainly proceeds upon a very false principle; and this will appear more evident, by taking a view of another of the divine perfections; I mean, creative power. That God can give existence to what formerly had none, must be admitted upon the most unquestionable principles; yet the manner of such an operation is quite inconceivable to us. But as this imperfection of our understanding is no argument against such an
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act of divine power, there is no reason why it should be considered as any against the above mentioned species of divine knowledge.

BUT we shall find greater difficulties still arising from some other of the divine perfections. I shall at present only mention eternity. We cannot conceive of eternity but as an interminable successive duration; and we cannot conceive of a successive duration but as consisting of parts: But eternity can never consist of parts; for each of these parts is finite, and no number of finite parts, be it ever so great, can constitute what is infinite: For there is no proportion betwixt finite and infinite; they are altogether incommensurable. In our idea, therefore, of eternity, we absurdly confound finite with infinite, and eternity appears to be an object not barely above

bove our comprehension, but what even seems to involve it in a contradiction. But from this shall we infer, that there is a real contradiction in the nature of the thing? This cannot be; for something eternal must be: And the proper inference is, That the object is disproportioned to our capacity, and we are not able to regard it in a true and full light. And this ought to be the rather allowed, that in no instance whatever, where our ideas are adequate and clear, could it ever be alledged that there was a real contradiction in the nature of things.

BUT it is not necessary to ascend to the infinite perfections of God, in order to be sensible of the great weakness and imperfection of our understandings.

LET us only turn our thoughts inward on ourselves; let us consider the nature
either

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either of our souls, or our bodies, and the manner of their subsistence, and we shall find these far beyond our comprehension. If we are asked, what the substance or essence of matter is? we cannot tell. If the same question is put with regard to the soul, we are equally at a loss. That the soul is, or that it has a continued and identical existence, we know with the greatest certainty, that is, by an immediate consciousness. By this we have the clearest and most intimate perception that the principle in us which thinks, is different from every idea which is the object of thought; that it still remains when the several ideas vanish in a constant succession; that it can, however, retain these ideas for some time, reflect upon them, and compare them together, and distinguish them from one another. Thus we can, at one and the same time, hear music, see a fine garden, perceive the odor
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of flowers, and feel cold or heat; we can compare these different sensations, and prefer the one to the other. The slightest attention, therefore, must convince us, that what compares and distinguishes these or any other different sensations or ideas, what still retains the consciousness of its existence when these ideas have given place to others, must be very different from the ideas themselves, and must remain and still exist when these are gone.

BUT, though we have this intimate knowledge of the permanent existence of the soul; yet how it exists either in matter or out of matter, is a thing that passes our comprehension.

LET us even descend to these matters where it is allowed we have the greatest certainty, and which are the subjects

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jects of mathematical demonstration, we shall still find ourselves in many cases equally non-plussed, and be made abundantly sensible of the weakness of our faculties.

THE divisibility of matter *in infinitum*, and some conclusions which are evidently deduced from that doctrine, as much confound as they enlighten our understandings. Let it be told a person not conversant about such speculations, that two lines may be drawn from two points not much distant from one another, in such a manner, that the more they are produced they shall approach nearer to one another; and yet, though produced *in infinitum*, they shall never meet*: This will be regarded by such person as a downright absurdity; yet

* Hyperbola and its asymptotes.

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the thing is true ; and though the comprehension of it is difficult, yet our minds are more reconciled to the truth of it, as we attentively consider the principles upon which it proceeds.

THESE reflections might be pursued to a great length ; but at present, I shall only consider the effect they ought to have upon our minds.

WHEN by these we are made sensible how many things are removed far beyond the reach of our comprehension, and that, in this case, we are very apt to form wrong opinions, often the very reverse of the truth ; a due sense of this ought to inspire us with that habitual modesty and caution which should prevent any positive opinion concerning matters that are but very imperfectly apprehended by us. Philosophers and divines, who

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who form peremptory opinions in those matters of religion which are evidently abstruse and far beyond our reach, often transgress against this well established rule. Their reasonings indeed will appear sometimes very specious; but, if we ascend to their principles, we will often find them only hypothetical, or at least so imperfectly apprehended as that they cannot lay a solid foundation for a just and firm conclusion.

It is even certain, that many things we do, and must believe upon principles distinct from reason, which, if that faculty was to be consulted, it might readily oppose. Let us take an example out of a great number: The union of the soul and body we believe from an immediate perception and consciousness of it. If we were, however, to make this truth an abstract object of reason, that faculty not being

being able to discover the nature and manner of such union, might be ready (however rashly) to pronounce it impossible and absurd. The same observation might be easily applied to many other important truths which may stagger our feeble reason, yet force the assent of the mind, take hold of the heart, and influence the conduct.

WE shall further just observe, that, even in natural philosophy, men are unwilling to acquiesce in the possession of those truths which their senses and experience have sufficiently discovered; they would fain ascend to the secret causes of things; nay, they vainly imagine these to be qualities of natural bodies themselves, which, however, are but mere instruments, and totally distinguished from that active principle which sets them in motion.]

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BUT it appears unnecessary to carry these reflections any further: Enough has been said to discover the nature, and show the solid foundation of the academical philosophy, which makes modesty and caution the support and ornament of truth. A philosophy which, by refusing too easy an assent, secures us against scepticism; and, by doubting in matters where there is something obscure or imperfectly apprehended, makes way for the firmer and more perfect reception of truth, when ever it is supported by sufficient evidence.

THIS excellent philosophy, originally derived from the ever memorable Socrates, was explained and illustrated by Plato, who, for that purpose, frequented a grove at a little distance from Athens, which was consecrated to the memory of Academos, an Athenian hero, from whence

whence this philosophy received the name of Academical. From Plato it was transmitted through a succession of several eminent persons, who maintained it upon its original excellent plan; at last, Arcefilas received the academy.

THIS philosopher seems to have possessed an uncommon degree of subtilty and acuteness. His consciousness of this, joined to a large share of vanity and conceit, seems to have determined him to desert the old principles of the academy, and to set up upon a peculiar plan of his own. Ambitious to be the head of a sect, he appears only to have attended to the novelty and singularity of his opinions, altogether regardless of the consequences so fatal to the peace of mankind.

He

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HE disputed upon each side of a question, and always thought he found equal reason to reject both. From this he was led to the following conclusion, the distinguishing, and indeed the only principle of his philosophy, That there was no distinction betwixt truth and falsehood, or at least, that the human faculties could not apprehend it.

BEFORE I make any reflections upon the consequences of this principle, or its deviation from the old academy, it may be proper shortly to observe, that being contrary to nature, and destroying at once all the principles of action, it could not long subsist; and was therefore supplanted by Carneades, the author of the new academy, who, though he also disputed subtilly upon each side of a question; yet he was obliged to allow of the distinction betwixt probable and improbable,

probable, as a necessary principle of action; upon which Cicero, who was a stickler for this sect, justifies his writing a treatise of offices.

As in this there appears to be truth, we shall make no further remarks upon this philosophy; though, if it is allowed that there may be a reason to affirm an opinion to be probable, it would be no difficult matter to show, that in many instances at least, there may be an equal reason to affirm an opinion to be certain.

WE shall only further just observe, that it does not appear necessary to take any notice of Pyrrho. His notions seem to have been much the same with those of Arcefilas, though he had no concern in the academy: Only, it is said of him, that he affected to support his principles by his practice, and pretended to make

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no distinction betwixt a plain road, a river, or a precipice; which, if true, would have been so far from gaining credit to his philosophy, that it would only have demonstrated the author of it to be a madman, and rendered it necessary to confine him to bedlam.

WE shall now return to make some remarks upon the doctrine of Arcefilas, and to consider how far it has deviated from the wise institutions of Plato.

AT first view, it may appear, that the innovation of this philosopher differs from the old academy only in degree, carrying the doubt, common to both, to a greater extreme. But if we shall examine the matter with more attention, we shall discover that they are two very distinct species of philosophy, and even directly opposite

posite to one another in their principal design.

It was the great intention of the first, to point out the surest way to truth; but it was the avowed purpose of the other, to block up the avenue to truth altogether. The first recommended modesty, diffidence, and caution; virtues which imply distinction and choice: The other put all things upon the same level, or rather confounded them in one universal chaos. It was the great concern of Plato to find an antidote against scepticism, which he considered as the most dangerous disease of the mind; but scepticism itself was the grand conclusion which Arcefilas constantly had in view. Plato indeed greatly contracted our sphere of knowledge; yet he left it sufficient for the highest exercise of virtue, and all the noble purposes of life.

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But Arcefilas, by destroying this sphere altogether, annihilated at once every principle of action, and introduced an indifference issuing in despair. His philosophy indeed involves mankind in a more melancholy gloom than Æneas experienced in his passage to hell.

*Ibant obscuri, sola sub nocte per umbram
Quale per incertam lunam sub luce maligna,
Est iter in sylvis, ubi cœlum condidit umbra
Jupiter, et rebus nox abstulit atra colorem.*

THE sceptical philosophy must appear to be extremely unnatural, as it will not allow us to give assent to self-evident propositions, which it is yet not in our power to refuse: In such assent the mind is passive, and it is extorted from us whether we will or not.

AND it is vain to pretend, that self-evident propositions are discovered to be
inconsistent,

inconsistent, and must therefore destroy one another : For this could never once be alledged in cases where our ideas were clear and adequate ; and if, in other instances, there was any thing of a contrary appearance, the just conclusion to be made was, that our conceptions were imperfect and improper, and not that there was any inconsistency in things themselves.

INDEED, so unnatural is this extravagant doubt of Arcefilas, that even those who are disposed to embrace it, cannot remain long under its feeble influence ; but nature must recur upon them whether they will or not, and force them to think and assent like other men ; nay, we have no security from this philosophy even against the most presumptuous dogmatism : For, whilst the antient academician maintains his small but valuable
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stock of truth within the entrenchments of modesty, caution, and circumspection, he has something upon which to fix and establish his mind; whereas the wavering disciple of Arcefilas, under the influence of no proper principle, and having sure hold of nothing, is more easily carried over to the opposite extreme of the most peremptory dogmatism. Of this we may have occasion afterwards to give some examples.

OF the modern writers who have patronised the sceptical philosophy, none perhaps has wrote with more acuteness than Mr Hume. He has furnished us with an essay expressly upon this subject, intitled, *Of Academical or Sceptical Philosophy*, confounding, by this title, two species of philosophy, essentially different from one another, and which, therefore,

fore, ought to be carefully distinguished.

BUT we shall proceed to make some remarks upon the reasonings and sentiments of this very subtle author. We do not, however, so much mean to canvass these metaphysical arguments by which he endeavours to subvert the foundations of all truth and science, but to point out the absurd and even pernicious consequences of this species of philosophy.

WITH regard to the first, however, as he begins with discrediting the authority of our external senses, we may observe, That these were given us not so much to lead us directly into the internal nature and truth of things, as to intimate to us what was immediately useful and agreeable to our nature; and this
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excellent purpose they serve in a very remarkable manner.

WITH regard to real existence, our reasoning is chiefly founded in the necessary connection betwixt cause and effect. This connection he endeavours to break, not indeed in the essay under view, but in another place, to which he tacitly refers : And as this topic well deserves a separate consideration, we shall not enter upon it here; but only observe, that all his efforts are but vain and fruitless attempts to root up the great pillars of nature; and the engines he makes use of for this purpose have no better support than an opinion of Mr Lock's, which is either mistaken or erroneous.

HE ventures further to attack the foundations even of mathematical truth;
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and is so bold upon this subject, that it will be proper to quote his own words * : “ No priestly dogmas,” says he, “ invented on purpose to tame and subdue the rebellious reason of mankind, ever shocked common sense more than the doctrine of the infinite divisibility of extension, with all its consequences, as they are pompously displayed by all geometers and metaphysicians, with a kind of triumph and exultation : A real quantity, infinitely less than any finite quantity, containing quantities infinitely less than itself, and so on, *in infinitum* : This is an edifice so bold and prodigious, that it is too weighty for any pretended demonstration to support ; because it shocks the clearest and most natural principles of human reason.”

* Essay of the acad. or scept. Philos.

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THIS very bold and peremptory decision, is a proof and specimen of what was formerly observed, That the transition from the most determined scepticism to the highest extravagance of dogmatism, is most natural and easy. It is impossible for any dogmatist to assume a higher tone, or a bolder expression, than our author does upon this occasion; and yet, all this is founded on a great misapprehension of the subject he is considering; for no geometrician ever pretended to demonstrate, that matter was divisible into real or actual parts infinitely small. A real quantity infinitely small, is certainly absurd; for any one part of matter must undoubtedly bear some proportion to any other part that may be supposed; and consequently, cannot be infinitely less than it. All that geometricians demonstrate is, that matter cannot be divided into parts so small but that
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these are further divisible ; the consequence indeed is, that matter cannot be divided into actual or real parts, which are infinitely small, directly contrary to the supposition made by our author. A great mathematician expresses himself upon this subject in the following words : * “ Thus, (as we observed
 “ elsewhere), an absurd philosophy is
 “ the natural product of a vitiated geometry ; for though it follows from
 “ our notion of magnitude, that it always consists of parts, and is divisible
 “ without end ; yet an actual division *in*
 “ *infinitum* is absurd, and an infinitely
 “ little quantity (even in Mr Leibnitz’s
 “ judgement) is a mere fiction. Philosophers may allow themselves to imagine likewise, infinite orders of infinitely small particles of matter, and

* M’Claurin on Sir Isaac Newton, lib. 1. cap. 4.

“ suffer themselves to be transported
 “ with the idea; but these illusions are
 “ not supported by sound geometry, nor
 “ agreeable to common sense.”

OUR author proceeds to consider the nature of time, in which he falls into an equal absurdity. He makes the supposition of an infinite number of real parts of time passing in succession. But an infinite number is a glaring absurdity; for nothing that is infinite can consist of finite parts, which can bear no proportion to it; and indeed an infinite number is a number that cannot be numbered, that is to say, no number at all.

INDEED it must be confessed, that, in attempting to form an idea of eternity, the mind is distressed with apparent contradictions. But, from this, shall we infer, that there is a contradiction in the
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thing itself? The most natural inference surely is, That such contradictions are entirely the effect of our improper and imperfect conceptions of an object too big for our weak faculties.

AND a reflection upon this should lead us back to the principles of the old academy, which admonish us to be cautious and modest in our decisions with regard to matters intricate and sublime, where we find our ideas to be very imperfect.

BUT we shall now proceed to consider the consequences of this sceptical philosophy. The great consequence must indeed strike every one at first view. It must introduce an universal lethargy and insensibility; as it destroys all distinction betwixt truth and falsehood, good and evil, there can remain no principle to prompt us to action, nor any object to concern ourselves

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ourselves about: For though we should believe our own existence, we cannot believe the existence of any thing else. Thus each individual would be abandoned to a state of total indolence and despair, and the whole race of men would speedily be extinguished.

OUR author is himself shocked with this frightful view of things; and flies with abhorrence from that miserable philosophy which produces it. But let us consider what expedient he falls upon to relieve himself. In place of this absolute scepticism, he substitutes what he calls a more mitigated scepticism, and which he considers as partly the result of the former, and as tending to inspire us with modesty, caution, and reserve.

BUT this is a palpable piece of sophistry; for modesty and caution imply

a distinction betwixt truth and falsehood, though not always easy to be discovered; but as absolute scepticism totally destroys such distinction, what place can there be for these virtues, or, upon what objects can they be exercised?

OUR author, in reality leads us back imperceptibly to the old academy, whose principles indeed inspire us with modesty, and are at the same time peculiarly calculated to guard us against Pyrrhonism, as has been formerly observed.

BUT our author proceeds still to mention another species of mitigated scepticism, and which he also considers as the result of Pyrrhonism, by which he distinguishes the objects of our knowledge. But it must be evident, at first view, that such effect can never flow from a principle which

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which at once destroys all truth, and confounds every distinction whatever.

HE allows, that nothing but the strong power of natural instinct can free us from the force of the Pyrrhonian doubt: Now, instinct is not a rational principle; and therefore reason never can overcome such doubt. It is vain, therefore, for a Pyrrhonist to talk of a correct judgement, as our author does; for Pyrrhonism excludes the judgement altogether, as it allows of no principles upon which it can proceed.

NAY, as Pyrrhonism represents the intellectual faculty as totally unsound and disordered; it is therefore to be rejected altogether, not only in the admission of principles, but in every operation regarding them. It is impossible, therefore, to extricate ourselves from the embarrassment

baraffment and diftrefs which our author is fo fenfible we are thrown into by abfolute fcepticifm, but by returning to the deserted principles of the old academy.

AGREEABLY to thefe principles, we may afcribe to the human mind the faculty of intelligence, or the power of difcerning truth, as eftablifhed upon a folid foundation, at leaft in fome inftances.

IT is, and always will be perceived as true, That two and three are equal to five. It is, and always will appear a certain demonftration, if duly attended to, That the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right ones. The mind may acquire the poffeffion of many truths attended with an equal evidence. But in our too eager purfuit of knowledge, we are
apt

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apt to run a great risk, either by hastily assenting to propositions not duly examined, or by stretching beyond our sphere in quest of objects too remote or sublime for our narrow faculties. The old academy warns us of this danger, and prescribes proper rules to guard us against it. It admonishes us to keep a firm guard against rash and hasty assent; and also carefully to examine the strength, or perhaps rather the weakness of our intellectual faculties, and the proportion they bear to the several objects which may be presented to them. We may therefore consider the different objects of our knowledge, in relation to this philosophy of Plato, but not that of Arcesilas, which excludes all difference and distinction whatever. We shall accordingly make some observations upon our author's opinion with regard to this matter.

HIS

HIS principal design indeed appears to be, to banish religion altogether from our thoughts. Its best and most solid foundation he affirms to be faith and divine revelation: And how insufficient, in his opinion, this foundation is, he has very explicitly informed us elsewhere*. He maintains, That the non-existence of any being, without exception, is as clear and distinct an idea as its existence: That it is vain to inquire into the origin of worlds: That we should leave all distant and high inquiries to the arts of priests and politicians; and that we should confine ourselves to common life, and to such subjects as fall under daily practice and experience.

BUT let us examine this matter upon the principles of the old academy. These

* Essay 10. of miracles.

G

principles,

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principles, indeed, chiefly recommend to us an attention to common life and practice. But to what purpose do we give this attention? It must surely be in order to regulate our lives in such a manner, as to procure the greatest good to ourselves and others; that is, to live virtuously. Now, the cause of virtue and religion are so intimately connected, that they cannot be separated: For a just sense of religion established in the mind, is at once the surest guard against vice, and the noblest motive to virtue. It bestows dignity and importance equally upon the objects and exertions of human conduct, and renders duty no less pleasing than necessary: So that, without it, all the transactions and achievements of mankind, and even life itself, have little or no value. And we must agree in opinion with that illustrious philosopher, the Emperor Antoninus, when he asserts, That
without

without God and Providence, life is not worth the living.

AND further, those principles of religion which immediately influence virtue are plain and obvious to the meanest capacities, and as sensibly felt by the vulgar as by the most profound philosopher. The natural movements of the heart carry us towards them, and the principle of conscience, with very little reasoning, binds them upon us in the strongest manner. Every thing without us and within us, leads to the acknowledgement of a God ; nor is it possible to form a clear and distinct idea of the non-existence of a first cause of all things, a necessary and eternal Being.

So far was Plato, the first publisher of the academical philosophy, from thinking, that religion had little connection with

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with common life, that his sentiments were the very reverse; and he considered atheism and impiety as having the most pernicious influence upon human conduct; in so much that, in his tenth book of laws, after distinguishing several species of atheism and impiety, he proposes that a law should be made, that those persons who have been led to atheism, not from the wickedness of their lives, but some certain species of madness, should be confined to a house of correction for the space of five years; and, in the mean time, proper care should be taken to recover them to a just way of thinking; but that, if after this they should ever be found guilty of impiety, they should be punished with death; and that those who to their atheism joined a wicked and flagitious life, should be shut up for life in a dismal prison, and no free person should ever have access to them;

them; and that, after death, their bodies should be exposed, unburied, without the Attic territory.

ALL our author's vain though subtle reasonings in relation to cause and effect, certainly never entered into the head of any man, so as to form the least opposition to the strength of that argument for the existence of a Supreme Being, which naturally arises from the connection of cause and effect.

IT is this argument which alone proves the existence of every thing besides ourselves, and which proves the existence of God with more certainty than that of any thing else; so that, before we reject the opinion of a Deity, we must deny the existence of every being but ourselves: When therefore we distinguish the objects of our knowledge, we must
not

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not exclude religion altogether, but ought to consider it carefully in its different lights.

SOME parts of religion are so obvious and plain, and have such an essential influence upon the just conduct of life, that we will find it both our wisdom and interest to embrace and cultivate them. But there are indeed other matters in religion which rise far above our scanty faculties. In vain do we pretend to trace the amazing perfections of an infinite Being, or to determine the nature and manner of his existence. It is arrogance and presumption to censure any part of his universal administration, when our ideas of it are so very obscure and imperfect. We have often reason to suspect, that in matters of such high speculation, the truth itself is very different from those specious appearances which would obtrude

obtrude themselves upon us as such, and to which we are apt to give too easy a reception.

HERE then is the field where we cannot too much exercise the virtues of modesty, caution, and reserve; and here we find the proper use of the wise principles of the old academy, to which we cannot pay too great regard. But what an inconsistent and preposterous thing is human nature? For it is to be observed, that the sceptics themselves are often the most positive and decisive with regard to matters of the most subtle and difficult speculation; they would reduce them to the standard of their own very imperfect ideas, and from such improper premises, hesitate not to infer the conclusion. This indeed they may do often speciously, whilst men are unwilling to attend to the weakness of their faculties
and

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and imperfection of their ideas, and are consequently led to give too hasty an assent. But it is here where true philosophy chiefly recommends modesty and doubt; and had its precepts been duly listened to, and properly cultivated, they would have shut the firmest door against scepticism, and also prevented many useless, if not hurtful, disputes among philosophers and divines.

FROM the observations already made upon the academical and sceptical philosophy, these two species must appear not only different from, but even contrary to one another. The first lets fall a gentle light upon these truths which are of the greatest importance: The last wraps up all things in total darkness. The one, inspiring us with modesty and caution, preserves us from error: The other, destroying all distinctions, leaves the mind
without

without any guard at all. The principles of the one are calculated to prevent rash assent, and positive opinion; but the other, having no foundation to fix upon, cannot secure us against even the highest dogmatism. But their difference is perhaps still more conspicuous in their effects upon the heart, than those upon the mind.

SCEPTICISM exhausts the native strength of the soul, by withdrawing every thing that can cherish and support it: But the more auspicious academy, by placing us under the guard of providence, inspires the heart with vigour, alacrity, and hope. The one leaves us weak and defenceless in a forlorn world: But the other acquaints us, That we act under the eye and protection of an universal Parent.

H

WITH

WITH regard to conduct, scepticism confessedly cuts all the sinews of action, removes every connection with, or concern for others, and reduces us to a state of stupid indifference and sullen despair. But the better academy makes way for the exertion of all the active powers, under the influence of virtue. Indeed, with regard to the intricate nature of things, it is modest and cautious, both in its speculations and decisions. But, at the same time, it cultivates those affections which connect us with those of our own species, whilst we are engaged to consider all as united under the divine administration, and that not merely from abstract reasonings, but from the perception of that universal and admirable order which strikes every sense, and is felt by every faculty.

CAN

CAN we hesitate, therefore, in our choice betwixt two such opposite species of philosophy? Reason and nature will not permit this.

SOME truths are so plain and evident, that reason must assent to them; and self-love is so essential to the mind, that it will engage us in some course of action or other in pursuit of happiness.

LET us then comply with the modest philosophy of the old academy. This indeed will check the presumption of those men, who, from a conceit of their own genius, boldly decide in matters above their sphere, and thereby often lose truths which might be within their reach: But it will, however, furnish us with proper principles of action to discharge the duties we owe to God and man; in doing which we shall find ourselves animated
by

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by the agreeable persuasion of that constant and universal providence of the Deity, which, (to use the words of an ingenious and elegant writer), * “ gives
“ strength to our hopes, and firmness to
“ our resolutions, subdues the insolence
“ of prosperity, and draws out the sting
“ of affliction: In a word, it is like the
“ golden branch to which Virgil’s hero
“ was directed, and affords the only secure
“ passport through the regions of
“ darkness and sorrow.”

WE shall conclude just with observing, that the disciples of Socrates made use of the principles of this excellent philosophy, not only to govern and direct them in their inquiries after truth, but also to limit and confine these inquiries to the most important objects of it. They observed the large field of science to be too

* Fitzosborne’s letters, letter 8.

extensive

extensive for the weak and limited faculties of man; this reflection naturally led them to give their chief application to what most immediately tended to the perfection and happiness of their nature; and this was undoubtedly the science of morals; a science whose province it was to rectify the heart and regulate the conduct, whilst other sciences were directed to objects of a more external nature.

THESE philosophers, therefore, though they paid a proper regard to such sciences as were useful or ornamental in life; yet, whenever they observed these separated from virtue, (which was often the case), they accounted them fallacious and vain *, and exerted all their industry, not only to trace out the true path of virtue, but also to discover the most effectual motives to inspire the mind

* Ceb. Tab.

with

with constancy and resolution proportioned to its most arduous atchievements. And indeed, they could derive motives of this importance from no other source than that of religion, which alone opens up truths the most interesting and the most universally felt by mankind.

THE doctrine of the immortality of the soul, in particular, they applied to this noble purpose; whilst, after the example of their great master, they taught mankind, that it was vain to hope for happiness hereafter, without studying at present to make all possible improvement in wisdom and virtue.

OF

O F

A C T I V E P O W E R.

THE intimate nature of the soul is unknown to us ; neither can we comprehend how or in what manner it thinks. That it thinks, however, we have the greatest certainty ; that is, an intimate consciousness.

ALL the ideas which we naturally refer to things without us, appear to be derived from some kind of sensation or other, in the reception of which the mind is intirely passive. But, previous to the admission of such ideas, the mind appears to be possessed of some kind of consciousness, at least of that of its own existence,

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existence, without which we cannot comprehend how it could be at all sensible of the impression of any thing external.

MR LOCKE derives all our ideas from sensation, or from reflection upon the operations of the mind in relation to them. It may indeed be allowed, that the first notions of things are given to the mind by means of some sensation or other: But then it may also be true, that after such notices are given, the mind, by the exertion of some inherent power, may be able to discover some remarkable qualities of such things, and even things of a very different nature, which are not to be discovered merely by any sense whatever.

IN the reception of our original ideas, the mind, as has already been observed,
is

is intirely passive; but, in the reception of those subsequent ones, it is manifestly active. In order to prove the truth of what we have advanced, it is not necessary to enter into a general examination of Mr Locke's doctrine; it will be sufficient to make trial of it in a particular instance, which shall be that of active power, a quality of the greatest and most universal importance, upon which all the changes in nature absolutely depend.

MR LOCKE endeavours, agreeably to the principles he hath laid down, to trace the origin of our idea of active power up partly to some sensation, partly to some reflection of the mind on its own operations. The sum of his reasoning is, That the mind, observing the frequent changes made upon things, considers in one thing the possibility of having any of its simple ideas changed; and in another, the possibility

I

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fibility of making that change; and so comes by that idea which we call *power*.

BUT let us consider this matter with accuracy and attention. If we suppose that matter has in itself a power to begin motion, and to act upon another part of matter; yet, this power is not the object of any sensation: All that our senses take notice of, is the mere motion of matter; but whether this motion is produced by matter itself, or some other cause, is what the understanding, not the senses, is the proper judge of. If we see a stone moving in the air, sense indeed perceives the motion, but cannot determine whether this motion was begun by the stone itself, or by something else very different from it. Our idea of power is therefore an intellectual idea, and not perceivable by any sense whatever.

BUT

BUT let us next consider reflection as the source of our idea of power. If we suppose indeed, that the mind has in itself a power to act, and which it exerts upon proper occasions, it must acquire the clearest idea of power by the immediate consciousness of its own operations: But, as some pretend to question such a power of the mind, in order to avoid any dispute upon this occasion, we shall proceed to try how the mind may otherways acquire an idea of active power.

WHEN we observe a change made upon any thing, it is natural for us to consider how this change has happened. In doing this, we immediately perceive, that the change must be effected either by the thing changed itself, or by some thing else which may be connected with it: For, if we suppose the thing itself to
continue

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continue as it was, and likewise exclude the influence of every other being, we clearly perceive there can be no change at all. Whilst the ground and reason of its existence continues the same, the thing itself must remain in the same state, without any change whatever. There appears to be no proposition that carries along with it a stronger degree of evidence; and any reasoning we bestow upon it is no more than placing it in different points of light, in which it still appears with an undiminished lustre.

BUT as abstract propositions may be apt to fatigue the mind, if we shall try this matter by fact and experience, it will still receive the greatest confirmation. Let us only consider the motions of the members of our bodies: Some of those are constantly obedient to the inclination

clination of the will. When we will to move our finger, for example, it immediately moves in what manner we please; we therefore justly infer, that there is a real and necessary connection betwixt the will and such motion of the finger. It may be observed, that it is needless here to determine whether the mind is the proper cause of this motion, or some superior being effectually co-operating with it; for that does not in the least affect the argument. Mr Hume alledges, that in the case mentioned, and in all other similar cases, there is only a constant conjunction of things without any real connection; which conjunction must therefore be purely casual: That is, when I will to move my finger, the motion that follows has no real connection with my will, but happens only by accident, just at the time I willed the motion; and consequently
would

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would have taken place whether I had willed it or not. But this is quite inconsistent with that immediate consciousness I have of the motion always taking place, and always varying according to every the least variation of my will ; a thing altogether incompatible with mere chance. Two things indeed, that have no real connection, may exist together casually at the same time ; but when one thing constantly attends another, when all its variations perfectly correspond to the meaning and intention of that other ; when it ceases to be, when that ceases ; this is the strongest proof imaginable of design and of real connection, whether mediate or immediate, and is quite beyond all the power of chance.

THUS, from a constant observation of the order and connection of things, as
well

well as from the clearest intuitive perception, we acquire the idea of active power; that is, of a quality in some being, whereby it is able to produce a change in relation to another, and to give existence to some new mode or thing which did not exist before. What produces the change we call *cause*, the production itself we call *effect*; and we consider power as the necessary quality which connects these.

THERE are indeed no ideas more universally acknowledged than those of cause and active power; even the lowest of the vulgar, upon the appearance of any new object, is ready to put the question, not if it had a cause, but what the cause of it is. And the ancient philosophers, who seldom agreed in any thing; yet all agreed in this, that every effect must have a cause, as Cicero, in his book *de fato*, informs us, including

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including even Epicurus himself. And indeed, the idea of active power is the only means whereby we can with certainty come to the knowledge of the existence of any being besides ourselves.

OUR idea of active power, as has been already hinted, is not the effect of any sensible impression of external objects, in which the mind is intirely passive; but is acquired by the action of the mind in the exercise of its intelligent faculty, whereby it discovers, by a necessary inference, or rather intuitive perception, that such a quality must be; and in this manner also it discovers many other intellectual ideas. Mr Locke's opinion as to the origin of these ideas, however respectable, is not decisive: For these are matters to be determined by reason, and not authority. Mr Locke admits the idea of power as unquestionable;

tionable ; but if it is to be derived from reflection, this word is to be taken in a larger sense than in what that judicious writer seems to understand it.

OUR idea of power, however certain and real, is yet imperfect; as we cannot justly conceive how an active being begins to exert this quality. But this is no reason for denying the quality altogether, any more than it would be to deny that we think, because we cannot explain how and in what manner we think.

BUT, as Mr Hume and some other ingenious writers have taken an opportunity, from the imperfection of our idea of power, to take away that quality altogether, or grossly to misrepresent it; the subject is of that importance as to merit some farther examination.

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THE highest degree of power is that which can give being to what before had no existence. That some things now exist which once did not exist, must be admitted, and seems to be so indeed by Mr Hume himself: But, upon pretence, that we can have no idea of power, he would lead us to believe that such things may have started up out of nothing without any cause whatever. But this reasoning contradicts and destroys itself; for most certain it is, that we can have no idea of any thing beginning to exist from nothing, without a cause; and therefore, if there is no cause, such thing, according to his reasoning, cannot exist. If, then, what is allowed to begin to exist, can neither exist with nor without a cause; it must necessarily follow, that what begins to exist does not exist at all. But if we will reason justly, we will never be involved

volved in such a glaring contradiction. We have indeed no proper idea of a creative power; but neither can we limit the perfections of an almighty Being, or bring them down to the standard of our very weak faculties. For aught we know, such a Being may have a creative power; whereas, on the other hand, it must appear certain, that no being whatever could, of itself, begin to exist from nothing. Our clear perception of this truth is not liable to any objection arising from the imperfection of our faculties; for, let them be ever so imperfect, they can clearly comprehend, that nothing has no qualities at all; and consequently, that it can have no qualities superior to our conceptions, or that can be considered as the reason or ground of any change whatever: And thus we may clearly avoid the above-mentioned contradiction, by allowing a creative power; a thing which, though

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though we cannot conceive, yet we have no reason to deny.

BUT we shall proceed to the consideration of another topic, which will not only throw light upon the present argument, if it needed any, but will also discover another material quality essential to any efficient cause, and that is intelligence.

POWER alone is not sufficient for the production of any thing ; for we cannot conceive how a being possessed of power, can exert this quality without an intention and design so to do ; and intention and design evidently imply thought and intelligence. This general argument we may have occasion to resume afterwards ; and therefore at present we shall confine our reasoning to a regular production.

THE

OF ACTIVE POWER. 77

THE system of this universe discovers the most amazing order and regularity in its whole contrivance ; and it also every day produces new forms in which a like order and beauty is constantly observed. This could never be the effect of mere power : It necessarily implies also intelligence and design ; for no degree of power whatever, acting in a blind and casual manner, could produce any regular effect at all ; much less that amazing order and proportion which are every where so conspicuous through this immense universe. Intelligence therefore is as necessary as power to the production of such an effect ; and it would be equally impossible to account for it if we should exclude either of these qualities.

AND this is an additional proof (if such was necessary) of the necessity of a
cause,

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cause, in order to the production at least of a regular effect. Such a production requires intelligence as well as power. These qualities must be essentially united and jointly concur in demonstrating the necessity of a cause. Upon this occasion, it is natural to remark the superlative absurdity of Mr Hume's opinion, in supposing an effect, at least a regular effect, to begin to exist without any cause at all: For, in the first place, this opinion supposes, that all the parts of the universe took their regular station which they now occupy in a fortuitous and casual manner, which is much the same with Epicurus's fortuitous concourse of atoms; a ridiculous fiction now universally exploded.

BUT, further, it conjoins with this a notion still more absurd, if possible, that every thing began to exist from nothing,

thing, without any cause at all; a strain of extravagance which never could enter into Epicurus's thoughts: For he allowed some cause (though a very improper one) of the origin of this mundane system.

HAVING now demonstrated, that power is a real quality which connects cause and effect; and that consequently every effect must have a cause, we shall make one general observation more upon another very extraordinary opinion of Mr Hume. That subtle writer, where he is pleased to make the supposition of cause and effect, observes, " That as the
 " universe shows wisdom and goodness,
 " we infer wisdom and goodness; as it
 " shows a particular degree of these per-
 " fections, we infer a particular degree
 " of them precisely adapted to the ef-
 " fect we examine; but further attri-
 " butes,

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“butes, or further degrees of the same
“attributes, we can never be authorised
“to infer or suppose, by any rules of
“just reasoning.”

Now, with regard to the first cause, we certainly infer other attributes than the effects themselves can show; attributes of which the effects cannot bear the least resemblance; such as eternity, necessary existence, immutability, independency, &c. If we therefore can infer these incommunicable attributes, then, by conjoining them with the former attributes, we are led to form much higher ideas of these than the effects themselves would immediately lead us to, unless we should suppose the present universe, viewed in its full extent and duration, to be the most perfect work of an infinite Being.

AFTER

OF ACTIVE POWER. 81

AFTER what has been said in general with regard to that remarkable quality which we call *power*, it may be of great importance to consider a little two very extraordinary exertions of it in relation to the first Cause, that is Creation, and Preservation of the world.

C R E A T I O N.

OUR senses give us the first notices of the material world, and of many of the great constituent parts of it; and a very little reflection convinces us of the constancy, order, and regularity which it every where maintains. But the mind of man, ever active and inquisitive, is not satisfied with the bare contemplation of these objects with which it is immediately affected: It pushes its researches a great deal farther, and has a natural
L curiosity

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curiosity to know from what source and origin all things proceeded, and for what end and purpose they were made.

THE supposition of the eternity of the world, is liable to so many insuperable objections, and consequently embraced by so few, that we shall not here bestow any reasoning upon it. The general, as well as the true opinion, is, that the present system of things had a beginning. Philosophers therefore have employed all their industry and acuteness, to explain how this wonderful frame of things was at first established; but all their attempts have met with such bad success, that their several opinions do not merit any particular refutation.

WITH

WITH regard to the antient philosophers, if any one has a mind to know their several opinions in relation to the origin of the world, he may find them in the introduction to the Universal History; and, if his patience can allow him to read them, he will meet with the grossest absurdities that could ever enter into the human mind. Instead of discovering any philosophic truth, he may indeed feel a good moral effect, and, from a deep sense of the weakness and disorder of the human faculties, may learn that modesty and caution so much recommended by the antient academy.

NEITHER have the modern philosophers succeeded better than the antients, notwithstanding their superior advantages.

MONSIEUR

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MONSIEUR de CARTES amused the world for some time with a philosophical scheme, which he endeavoured to render as plausible as possible. But, notwithstanding the additions and amendments made to it by some who succeeded him, that scheme has appeared to be intirely delusive and destitute of the least foundation in truth. That celebrated philosopher was never able to investigate that power which was necessary to produce his imaginary virtues; nor from these, however complicated, was he ever able to deduce that great order of things which is universally established. The great error of philosophers upon this point has been, that they have sought the principles of matter in matter itself, and have thereby totally confounded the cause with the effect.

It

IT is the proper province of a natural philosopher, to discover the real order of things, to examine the constant course of Nature, and to investigate those laws by which she is so invariably governed. In doing this, experience and observation must be of the greatest use, and will either prevent or correct the errors into which fancy and imagination is so apt to betray us.

THE slightest reflection will convince us, that neither matter nor the human mind could be eternal. The mutable, dependent, and arbitrary condition of these are absolutely incompatible with the nature of an eternal Being. Their existence must therefore have had a beginning; and the transition from nothing to real existence must have been instantaneous, as there can be no medium betwixt existence and non-existence.

It

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It must therefore give us the highest idea of the power of the first Cause, whose almighty command could instantaneously give being to what before had no existence; though it must be acknowledged, that this idea is very imperfect, and inadequate.

It was arbitrary in the first Cause of all, either to have instantaneously produced the material world in its perfect form, or otherways to have brought it to that form by some gradual operation. That the last was the case, is the opinion universally received. It has always been thought, that from a chaos, or confused jumble of the different parts of matter, this world was, by some gradual process, brought at last into that state of order and beauty in which it now appears. But in explaining this process, philosophers, even those who admitted of a
first

first Cause, have always thought it necessary to call in the aid of what they term natural causes; that is, certain powers or qualities of matter, which they suppose to have a natural tendency to order and perfection, and whereby they imagine, that the operation of the first Cause may at least be assisted. But the supposition of such natural causes is purely chimerical and imaginary, as we shall afterwards have occasion to show: At present, however, we shall take them for granted, and consider of what use they could be in the original formation of this universe.

WITHOUT entering into any general examination of such natural powers or causes, we shall single out two of the most remarkable, and of the most universal influence. These are the centripetal and centrifugal forces.

BESIDES

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BESIDES the influence which these have upon the lesser parts of matter, it is acknowledged, that all the regular motions of the heavenly bodies, which produce the great order of the universe, absolutely depend upon the proper combination of these powers. Now, if we will allow ourselves to reflect, these powers could be of no use in the original formation of the world; but, on the contrary, would prove immediate obstacles to it: For example, if the heavenly bodies were placed at too great a distance from the centre of gravity, the centrifugal force not having a sufficient counterpoise, would carry them off from the centre altogether. On the other hand, if they were placed too near that centre, they would rush into it from the prevailing force of gravitation: At any rate, their motions would be in orbits so excentric, as soon to prove fatal

tal to every living thing they contained. And in any of these cases it is evident, that the constitution of a regular system would be impracticable.

IN order to obtain that great and beautiful effect, the heavenly bodies must be placed at due distances from their common centre; in consequence of which, the powers under consideration will properly counterbalance one another, and, from their just composition, produce all those excellent effects which we now experience. The system of the world must therefore be brought to its full perfection before there could be the least room for these natural causes: Their action at any time prior to this, could produce nothing but confusion and disorder. This reasoning is also easily applicable to any other supposed natural causes. It is therefore vain and

M

absurd

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absurd to call in the aid of such causes to concur with the great first Cause, whose power is in itself all-sufficient and irresistible. And indeed, it is not to be wondered at, if this capital error, in explaining the original constitution of things, has led philosophers of all ages into so many absurd and even ridiculous opinions.

WE must, however, upon this occasion, do justice to one very illustrious writer, who alone perceived and discovered to mankind the great truths which we have been considering. Moses, the great legislature of the Jews, informs us, that God, at the beginning, brought all things into being from nothing, by a single act of his sovereign will. A truth, which, though certain, seems hardly to have been discovered by any of the antient philosophers. The
same

same divine author informs us, that after the matter of the world was produced, the almighty Creator, by a gradual process, brought it into that regular order and perfect form which it has ever since maintained, and that, by a simple act of his sovereign will, without the smallest intervention of those powers and qualities of matter, concerning which other philosophers have thrown out so much absurd and unintelligible jargon.

THAT GOD, if he had thought fit so to do, could have instantaneously produced the world in its compleat state of order and perfection, cannot be doubted. But one great reason, why the supreme Creator chose rather to do it by a gradual and successive operation, appears to be, that the intelligent spirits who pre-existed that grand event, might
have

have an opportunity leifurely to contemplate and admire fuch an amazing exertion of divine wifdom and power. And accordingly, we are affured, that upon this great occafion, “ the morning “ ftars fung together, and all the fons of “ God fhouted for joy *.” This confideration alfo difcovers the great propriety of the Mofaic representation, in which Light is taken notice of as the firft of the regular works of God; for fome fuch medium may have been fit, and even neceffary, to render vifible to the heavenly fpectators the gradual advances of this grand work to a ftate of full perfection.

THE fublimity of the Mofaic account has been taken notice of by Longinus, that celebrated critic: Its philofophic

* Job chap. xxxviii. ver. 7.

truth must appear as conspicuous from the preceeding reasonings.

THERE is one circumstance in the Mosaic account, which, though not a proper subject of abstract reasoning, seems to be of that importance as to merit our attention. He informs us, that God bestowed six days in compleating the form of the world, and rested from this great work upon the seventh. The knowledge of this could only have been received by revelation; and that this was the belief and persuasion of mankind concerning the origin of things, will appear evident, not only from the authority of Homer, and some other of the ancient poets who have affirmed it; but chiefly from this consideration, that almost all the different nations of the world have agreed in a period of time consisting of seven days, and have even
agreed

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agreed in the precise order of that period *. This is not to be accounted for but from some common and great cause; and is the more remarkable, that though the several nations differed in their calculations of months and years, which have yet a just standard in the nature of things; yet they exactly agreed in the period of weeks, though not founded on any natural phænomena, but appearing entirely arbitrary. The cause of this remarkable consent clearly appears from what Moses informs us; nor can we conceive how it is otherways to be accounted for.

HAVING therefore made these few observations upon the power of the first Cause, as exerted in the Creation of the world, we shall proceed also to consider

* Usher's letters, l. 105.

a little the same power, as displayed in the Preservation and Government of it.

PROVIDENCE.

HOWEVER necessary the power of the first Cause may be in the original production of things; yet some contend, that the system is brought to such a degree of perfection in its first constitution, as that it afterwards can make a shift for itself, and readily comply with certain supposed general laws, established for the regular direction of the natural world; nay, nothing is more common than to talk of natural causes, or certain powers and properties of matter, by means of which all the phænomena of nature are to be accounted for, without having recourse to the influence of the first Cause.

BUT

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BUT such opinions as these will, upon due consideration, appear to be the effect of a careless and superficial way of thinking, and altogether inconsistent with the real nature of things.

OUR reasoning on this subject will be both more clear and concise, if, instead of pursuing a general argument, we shall have a particular instance more immediately in view. We shall then consider the nature of gravity, as being an universal property of matter the effects of which are of the greatest extent.

IT is now an acknowledged determination in philosophy, that all bodies gravitate towards one another in a certain proportion, and according to an invariable law. But the question is, What is the cause of this universal property? Or what power is it which makes
bodies

bodies move in such a constant and regular manner? We need not here have recourse to a subtile æther as the cause of gravity: For, in the first place, it appears hardly possible to conceive, that such an æther could move these prodigious orbs with so great velocity, and at the same time with such unerring regularity: But then, if we could conceive this, it would be but removing the question a step further, in order to know what was the cause of the motion of this æther.

LET us then consider gravity as an original effect, and the power that produces it must either be in matter itself or without it. Let us examine the first of these suppositions, that the power which produces gravity is in matter itself. Now, matter is known to us only from experience and observation; and from all the ob-

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servations we are able to make, it appears to be entirely inert and passive. When at rest, it continues so till put in motion by some foreign cause; and when put in motion, it continues to move till stopt by some contrary force: So that natural philosophers have universally agreed to apply to matter the foregoing epithets of *passive* and *inert*. And yet many of these philosophers have (though most inconsistently) on other occasions supposed matter to contain in itself certain active powers, which they consider as the natural causes of particular sensible effects.

It may however be said, that, for aught we know, matter may contain in itself such active powers, though we are not able to perceive them. But, in the first place, this is an affirmation without any reason at all to support it; and therefore

therefore ought to gain no credit. But, farther, let us consider whether such powers are not altogether incompatible with the known properties of matter. To begin motion, seems evidently to imply design and intention: For we find it impossible to conceive how any being can begin motion without meaning and intending to do so; therefore, as matter is incapable of thought, and consequently of intention and design, we must, agreeably to all the ideas we can form, pronounce matter to be incapable of beginning motion. Whoever, therefore, affirms that matter itself begins motion, cannot give the slightest reason for this opinion, which he must even acknowledge to be unaccountable.

BUT let us consider the properties of matter more particularly. Every part of matter evidently consists of an indefinite

finite number of smaller parts ; before therefore any part of matter can begin motion, every part of that matter must at one and the same time begin to exert the moving power ; for it cannot be said that one particular part of the body is possessed of this moving power, whilst all the other parts are without it ; for besides that such particular part is also composed of other parts, we cannot ascribe a moving power to it, considered merely as a material substance ; for in this respect every other part must be equally susceptible of the moving power, if such power flows from a merely material quality : But if it is to be derived from a different source, then the principle of motion cannot be in matter, but in a subject of a very different nature,

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OF ACTIVE POWER. 101

IN consequence of this reasoning, we must admit the truth of what was above observed, that before any part of matter can begin motion, every part of matter must begin at one and the same time to exert its moving power, and this it must also do in the same line of direction; otherways a contrariety of the powers, by counterbalancing one another, would prevent motion altogether, or at least nothing but the most confused and irregular motion could be expected. Now, if we reflect upon the preceeding observations, before any part of matter can of itself accomplish the most simple species of motion, viz. that in a right line, there must be a concurrence of an almost infinite number of different circumstances, and those altogether beyond the power of any particular part of matter: For, in the first place, every part of the matter to be moved must exert the
moving

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moving power at one and the same time. Now, as these parts are innumerable, and equally independent upon one another, such a general exertion of the moving power, in one and the same point of time, can never be the effect of any quality in any particular part of matter: For, though we should suppose that part of matter capable to move itself; yet it could not be the cause of motion in the other parts, which must equally, and in the same manner, be possessed of that principle. As, therefore, we cannot find the cause of such a general effect in matter itself, we must search for it in a very different principle: And indeed, this must be a principle not only simple and immaterial, but also designing and intelligent: For a general effect, including the motion of innumerable particles of matter at one and the same time, could not proceed

proceed from a cause operating at random or fortuitously; but must unquestionably be the effect of intelligence and design.

THIS whole reasoning will receive additional force, if we add, that besides the indefinite number of parts to be moved at one and the same time, there are also an indefinite number of lines for the direction of that motion, one of which must be chosen or determined for all and every one of these parts; and this will necessarily lead us to the acknowledgement of an universal and designing cause, whose power all the innumerable parts of matter must instantaneously obey, and that in one and the same line of direction.

To this grand conclusion we are necessarily led even by the most simple species
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of motion. But it will appear still in a more strong and striking light, if we make but the slightest reflection upon those various and admirable powers which are actually employed in establishing and maintaining the great order of the universe. Gravity is a principle which is not only necessary to the regular motion of the planets, but appears to affect every particle of matter, at least within our system. This leads a great mathematician * to make the following just observation:

“ This one principle, (viz. gravity), so
 “ regularly diffused over the whole,
 “ shows one general influence and con-
 “ duct, flowing from one cause equally
 “ active and potent every where.”

BUT in order to maintain the planets in their proper orbits, besides gravity, a projectile

* M'Claurin upon Newton, lib. 3. cap. 4.

projectile or centrifugal force is necessary; and this force must vary according to the distances of the planets from their common centre; and these distances must be determined from two considerations: First, The distances of the planets from the common centre must be suited to their nature, and the utility of their inhabitants. Secondly, They must be at such distances from one another, as to prevent any improper mutual influence which would be productive of great disorder. When the distances are thus determined, the centrifugal force must be impressed in a due proportion to those distances; it must be stronger upon those planets which are nearest the sun, and weaker upon those which are at a greater distance, and that not in the single reciprocal proportion of the distances, but in proportion to their gravities, which

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are reciprocally as the squares of their distances. Now, all this admirable order, these wise and various laws of motion have been originally established, and constantly maintained with such exactness, as that the heavenly bodies, though moving with inconceivable velocity, have yet been retained in their proper orbits since their original creation, with the most unerring regularity. It seems hardly possible to reflect upon these things without being convinced, in the most irresistible manner, of the necessity of one Supreme, Intelligent, and Powerful Cause of all; a truth which, as has been already observed, we are necessarily led to, even from the consideration of the most simple species of motion.

CICERO, in his first book, *De Finibus*, makes the following very proper observation

fervation upon the philosophy of Democritus and Epicurus: "Quanquam utriusque quum multa non probo, tum illud inprimis, quod, quum in rerum natura duo quærenda sint, unum, quæ materia fit, ex qua quæque res efficiantur; alterum, quæ vis fit, quæ quidque efficiat: De materia differuerunt, vim et causam efficiendi reliquerunt."

THESE atomical philosophers have, according to this just observation of Cicero, confined their reasonings to the effects which might be produced by matter when put in motion; but did not consider, with any degree of attention, how matter was originally put in motion. Had they done this, they must have been necessarily led to the acknowledgement of a very different and much more noble principle; a principle possessed of power and intelligence, by whose influence alone

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alone it was possible for matter to be put in motion.

AND indeed, this great principle which we are searching after, can be no other than the power of the first Cause; for its influence is universal over all the matter in the mundane system, as to some effects, particularly that of gravity; and as to others also, it acts regularly in the same manner when-ever the same construction of parts takes place.

THIS universal principle of motion must therefore necessarily be under the immediate direction of that Supreme Wisdom and Intelligence which presides over the whole, and by which the order and constancy of the universe is invariably maintained.

CICERO

CICERO reasons in a very just and elegant manner concerning this great principle which we are now considering, in the following words, in his pleading for Milo : “ Est, est profecto illa vis; ne-
 “ que in his corporibus, neque in hac
 “ imbecillitate inest quiddam, quod vi-
 “ geat ac sentiat, et non inest in hoc
 “ tanto naturæ tam præclaro motu, nisi
 “ forte idcirco esse non putant, quia
 “ non apparet ac cernitur : Proinde
 “ quasi nostram ipsam mentem qua fa-
 “ pimus, qua providemus, qua hæc ipsa
 “ agimus ac dicimus, videre, aut plane
 “ qualis sit, aut ubi sit, sentire possimus.”

SOME, without any just reason, have formed an imaginary notion of what they call a *plastic nature*, appointed by God for the general direction of the universe. This opinion seems to have flowed from the vain conceits of the Epicureans,

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reans, who thought the government of the world gave real trouble to the Deity; or perhaps the asserters of it thought, that it was not worthy of God to preserve that world which he thought reasonable to create. Indeed, as we ourselves are conscious, that we have some task assigned us in that portion of the universe which is allotted to us, we may reasonably allow, that other intelligent natures may have different employments, suitable to their particular condition: But to ascribe to any finite being an universal power over all the works of nature, seems greatly to exceed any idea we can possibly form of the highest created intelligence.

BUT we are now prepared to consider what is the meaning of a *Natural Cause*, an expression which we so frequently meet with. Those who use this expression

OF ACTIVE POWER. III

sion seem to have been at little pains to explain what they mean by it. If they had, they would probably have avoided a great deal of that error and confusion into which it has led them. By talking so much of natural causes in a vague manner, they seem to have made way for some obscure idea of certain latent qualities in matter, whereby it was able of itself to produce a variety of particular effects: But, from the doctrine above explained, this is absolutely impossible: It is altogether inconsistent with the known properties of matter, that it should be the real and efficient cause of any thing whatever; and it is paying a vain compliment to the Deity, to suppose he can transfer his prerogative of governing the world to a subject absolutely incapable of active power. Matter can only be an instrument; but the power of acting upon it, and setting it

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it in motion, must be sought for in a principle quite different from matter.

A material instrument or machine may consist of many parts, which communicate an impressed motion in a regular manner, till at last a particular effect is produced. These parts are sometimes said to be the causes of the motion of the subsequent parts: But this is only a loose manner of expression; for, strictly speaking, they are but mere instruments in conveying the motion, whereby at last an intended effect is produced. But the proper and efficient cause of this effect is the power which first put the machine in motion, which we in vain search for in the machine itself.

IT is in this manner only, that we can account for all that variety of regular

lar effects discoverable in the natural world, such as gravity, electricity, vegetation, explosion, and many others that might be named; it is alone the energy of an universal Providence that can be the proper cause of them. Thus divine energy must be allowed to pervade and actuate all the parts of the universe, and that every moment. This universal cause indeed operates in a regular manner, and according to fixed and steady laws, that men may have an opportunity of exercising their rational faculties; and, from the knowledge of these laws acquired by experience, may trace the distant and future effects.

AND this is properly the subject of natural philosophy, which examines the structure and compound parts of material objects, the laws of motion by which they are governed, and the regular

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lar effects which are thereby produced. It is evident, that our senses are the chief foundation of this science; we must pursue it by constant experiment and observation, otherways we will run the greatest risk, of substituting our own vain conceits in the room of solid truth. Indeed, it must be owned, that the compound parts of natural bodies are so extremely subtile, and of such a delicate contexture, that our senses, though assisted by every artificial improvement, can penetrate but a very little way into that exquisite machinery which is made instrumental in the production of every natural effect. These our senses, however, are what we must chiefly consult in explaining this amazing mechanism, which every the least particle of matter seems to be possessed of.

BUT

OF ACTIVE POWER. 115

BUT when we would trace the proper cause of such effects, we must ascend to a higher sphere, and leave our senses far behind. The principle of action, as well as that of thought, is too refined for our corporeal senses; it is to be sought for without and beyond matter, and is only an object of pure intelligence. And thus it must evidently appear, that the Divine Power is the great principle and spring of action in the universe. It must also appear, that nothing could be more absurd than the attempt of those philosophers, who had recourse to what they called *Natural Causes*, in order to exclude the agency of the first Cause. This was, in reality, to substitute mere non-entities in the room of that Supreme Wisdom and Power which the nature of the thing absolutely required. We shall here exhibit only one specimen of this very absurd philosophy. Lucretius expresses

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expresses himself in the following manner :

Quis regere immensi summam, quis habere profundum

Indu manu validas potis est moderanter habenas ?

Quis pariter cœlos omnes convertere ? et omnes

Ignibus æthereis terras suffire feraces ?

Omnibus inque locis esse omni tempore præsto ?

THESE verses may perhaps please the imagination ; but the effect they have on the judgement must be very different. Upon pretence that the great operations which he there mentions are superior to the power of the Deity, he excludes the Deity altogether, that he may resolve them all, agreeably to his avowed principles, into certain properties of matter, or rather into names which have no real meaning at all. Does it require a greater power than the Supreme Being is possessed of to govern
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OF ACTIVE POWER. 117

the world, and shall we yet find such a power in mere matter itself? or rather, is such an effect so easy as to require no exertion of power at all? Thus he lands himself either in a glaring absurdity or flat contradiction.

NATURE is often talked of by such philosophers as a wonderful enchantress, that can raise up every form at pleasure: But if those who talk so, will attempt to explain what they mean by nature, they will find it a mere name without any meaning at all, unless they consider it as the constant influence of the Supreme Creator over the works of his own hands.

INDEPENDENT of this influence, what can nature do? Can the passion-flower, by a natural skill in geometry, describe its various and regular circles? Can the tulip,

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tulip, of itself, make choice of the tints and arrangement of its beautiful colours? Does the cedar and the pine rise to heaven by their own strength? Or, do the seasons, so beneficial in their variety, by a particular agreement, divide the year among themselves? No; these are the works of Him “that formeth
“the mountains, and createth the wind,
“and declareth unto man what is his
“thought; that maketh the morning
“darkness, and treadeth upon the high
“places of the earth.” The beautiful appearances and agreeable vicissitudes of things, when accompanied with the slightest reflection, form that language which proclaims a Deity to mankind; and the sentiments of religion, which are thus naturally excited in the minds of the vulgar, are strengthened and confirmed by the most authentic sanctions of reason and philosophy.

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THE firm and incontestible consequence of all the above reasonings is, that as the power of the first Cause was necessary in the creation of the world, the same power is equally necessary in the preservation and government of it. This power must extend every moment to all the parts of the universe, the smallest particles of matter not excepted. A mere general providence, if duly examined, is a name without any meaning; and such a notion, though embraced by many writers of no inconsiderable character, can yet only be the effect of a very careless and superficial way of thinking. The divine influence must constantly pervade, actuate, and direct whatever exists. And nothing is more philosophically true, than that "in God we live, "move, and have our being; and that "not so much as a hair of our head can
" fall

“ fall to the ground without our heavenly Father.”

THIS indeed is a truth which readily offers itself to the natural sentiments of mankind, and is accordingly celebrated by several of the ancient poets. Many philosophers, affecting to be wiser than others, have indeed obscured it by their vain reasonings, and endeavoured to transfer the divine prerogative of governing the world to certain occult qualities, and unknown properties, which must yet be devoid both of activity and intelligence.

UPON this occasion, we may make a remark upon a very extraordinary opinion of Mr Hume's in relation to miracles. That subtle writer allows a miracle to be a violation of the known laws and established course of nature; but

but he is pleased to insinuate, that we have no reason to affirm that this course and these laws of nature can be altered even by an almighty Being *; in which case, a miracle must be impossible. No insinuation perhaps ever was so bold as this, and at the same time so destitute of the least foundation. This indeed must appear when we reflect that nothing can be more easily conceived than a real change in the present course of things; and that since even a man has power to make a body move upwards, contrary to its natural gravity, to refuse the same power to an almighty Being, must be an infinite absurdity. But farther, if, in consequence of the preceeding reasoning, we consider, that God is the real and constant cause of all the regular motions in the universe, these must

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* Essay of miracles, note last.

certainly be intirely in his power; and may consequently be altered by him at his pleasure. Nay, a miracle may be performed without any exertion of divine power at all; a bare suspension of this power in any particular instance, must produce a miraculous change, as a total abstraction of it would dissolve the universe. It is as easy therefore for God to perform a miracle, as it is to maintain the present course of nature. And with whatever certainty the regular course of nature may be from constant experience discovered; yet, as this is not inconsistent with the possibility of a miracle, so, whenever this last may take place, it is as capable of a satisfactory proof as the former; and as they are very consistent though different truths, the evidence of the one cannot stand in the least opposition to that of the other.

WE shall conclude this subject with some general reflections upon the importance of this remarkable quality of active power.

It is a quality which seems essential to a rational nature; and, without it, reasoning and reflection cannot possibly be conceived. We may suppose a being capable of receiving sensations and ideas from the impressions of foreign objects; but in that case, what would be the condition of such a being, if destitute of active power? It would be but a mere passive subject of such impressions, and could at best only be stupidly fixed in such sensations as these might produce. It would be no better than soft wax, which can indeed receive any figures from the application of external objects; but then it must also retain these according to their original impressions, without being

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ing able to make the least change or variation in any of them. If we should suppose such a merely intelligent or rather sensitive being to look up to the heavenly bodies, how would it be affected? It could only perceive certain sensible ideas, containing in themselves nothing regular or grand. It could have no notion of the real magnitude, distances, or periodical courses of these heavenly bodies. It could not have the least suspicion of a magnificent universe established and maintained by the most perfect order. Nay, if we should suppose such a being capable to receive ever so great a number and variety of sensible ideas, and even to recollect them when lost; yet without active power, it could never examine them with attention; it could not transpose, disjoin, compound, or vary them any manner of way whatever; neither could it compare them so

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as to discover their innumerable relations. Such a large stock of ideas as is supposed, would be to such a being nothing but a deformed waste, a confused chaos, where nothing of order, beauty, or good, is to be perceived. But let a certain degree of active power be communicated to this supposed sensitive being, what illustrious effects must this produce! It will now reflect upon its ideas; it will place them in every point of view; it will compare them and consider their various connections and agreements; it will be led even to examine their source and origin.

THIS active operation of the mind will, with a kind of creative energy, bring order out of confusion, and present to our view a fair, regular, and magnificent universe, where before we felt only some sensible impressions of little

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the importance, and without order or design; nay, by means of this conjunction of intelligence and active power, we are formed for higher contemplation still: We are able to trace the remote causes of things, and to discover their connection with the effects: We overleap those limits which confine the whole brute species, rise above all created objects whatever, and ascend to the first great Cause of all. Here we discover the purest sources of sentiment and affection, the noblest motives of virtue, and the most sublime objects of contemplation; we even venture to explore those divine perfections which in no degree can be communicated to any creature, and to which we can find nothing that bears the least resemblance in reflecting upon what passes within our own minds. Necessary existence, independency, immutability, eternity, we apply

ply to God, and to him alone. The contemplation indeed of such infinite perfections is apt to confound and overwhelm our created faculties; yet our ideas of them, however imperfect, are still so certain as that we are thereby enabled clearly to distinguish them from every thing else.

WE form even some idea of eternity itself, perhaps, one of the most astonishing of the divine perfections. This idea is indeed but negative; yet it is such as clearly discovers eternity to be different from any periods of time whatever, which can bear no manner of proportion to it. Thus, with strict philosophic truth, it is said of God, that in his sight a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years; for these distinctions of time, when compared with eternity, are totally lost and annihilated.

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annihilated. Therefore, in order to form the truest idea of eternity which the human mind is capable of, we are obliged to throw away all benefit we can receive from the idea of successive duration, which by us is always conceived as consisting of parts; whereas eternity cannot consist of parts at all. The idea of eternity is therefore a purely intellectual idea, rising above all sensation whatever; nor can we, reflecting upon our own minds, find any thing there that bears the least resemblance to it.

FROM the preceeding observations, the importance of active power, in relation to the understanding, must be sufficiently apparent; and particularly, that we are thereby enabled to acquire new ideas not arising from any sensation, nor even from reflection, at least in the restricted sense in which this has been considered

considered by Mr Locke. In the following essay we may have occasion to take some notice of its influence upon the will and affections, whereby it will appear to be the true source of the very important qualities of Liberty and Morality.

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LIBERTY AND NECESSITY,

THERE is perhaps no object of our knowledge more interesting than that of the human mind itself; and it has this peculiar advantage, that we receive the notices of it not merely from general and abstract reasonings, but from an intimate and immediate consciousness. At the same time, this immaterial being is so delicate and subtle in its nature, and possessed of such extraordinary powers and qualities, that our ideas and views of it are at best but very imperfect and obscure; and therefore all our inquiries concerning it ought to be conducted with the greatest modesty and caution.

PHILO-

PHILOSOPHERS, in order to take a more exact survey of the human mind, have generally distinguished the principal faculties of which it is possessed; and these are commonly supposed to be the Understanding and the Will. This distinction, perhaps, may serve some good purposes, as it confines the mind to more simple views of its object, and thereby prevents too great a distraction of thought; but if it is not accurate and exact, it may also prove the source of capital errors; which, perhaps, is the case here: For besides the understanding and the will, one important faculty of the human mind appears to be the power of acting, without which the two former seem to be easily enough conceived; and the bad consequences of neglecting this last faculty will easily appear, if we consider the nature of the other two.

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To the understanding all our original ideas are commonly referred, and in the production of these, the mind is allowed to be intirely passive. The will is considered as the seat of our inclinations, our desires, and averfions ; and these are excited in us by their respective objects, independent of the will itself; in which therefore the mind is also passive. By this confined view of the faculties of the mind, liberty will be totally excluded ; we must therefore admit the power of acting to what it can only be referred ; a power of which we are immediately conscious, which secretly mixes itself with the other faculties, and communicates that vigour and energy to the mind, without which the understanding would be stupid and idiotical, and the desires and inclinations prove altogether fruitless and abortive.

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BUT as the mind is in itself simple and indivisible, it does not seem to be of importance to our present subject to give any particular attention to the distinction of its faculties; we shall therefore carry on our reasoning without such view, and endeavour to examine with accuracy the famous question concerning Liberty and Necessity.

It seems to have been a question from the early ages of the world, Whether man was a free agent; that is, had in himself a proper principle of action? or if he was to be considered only as a very curious and extraordinary machine, whose movements and operations were all under the necessary influence of some foreign power? A sense of the constant dependence of man upon the Deity might have produced the last opinion, though other less honourable causes may have concurred.

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The first opinion seems naturally to arise from the consciousness of our own minds when we engage in any kind of action ; and as this consciousness is immediate, and always attends us, this opinion therefore seems to have been the most common and prevailing one.

THIS matter was of too great consequence to be overlooked by philosophers ; and accordingly, they have made it an object of their particular examination. In consequence of which, they embraced different opinions, whilst the greater part were asserters of Liberty ; but others, of no small note, particularly the Stoicks, maintained the doctrine of Necessity.

MANY very subtle and ingenious moderns have thought fit to patronize this last opinion ; and as they have entered
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into the argument with more accuracy and acuteness, we shall chiefly have in view their reasonings upon this subject.

INDEED, it must be confessed, that when dissatisfied with the opinion which naturally arises from the immediate consciousness of our own minds, we would trace the matter to its remote source and origin, and would explore the true and proper, though latent springs of action, these appear to be so delicate and subtle, that no sense can apprehend them; and even the understanding itself is fatigued and embarrassed in the difficult research.

As this is evidently the case, we ought surely to be modest and cautious in our decisions, and particularly upon our guard that we be not imposed upon

on by a specious sophistry instead of solid reasoning. And perhaps, after all our nice and intricate speculations, we shall find that there is more reason to trust those natural sentiments which are suggested by an immediate consciousness, than the uncertain conclusions which flow from premisses so imperfectly understood.

BUT we shall now proceed to the examination of this important subject, though with that caution and brevity which its arduous and obscure nature demands.

IN order to pursue the argument with clearness and precision, the first thing proper to be done, is to examine with due care and attention our ideas of Liberty and Necessity. As they are simple ideas, and not capable of definition, we shall best understand them if we trace them

them to their source and origin. And it will appear, that they arise from the different views under which cause and effect are presented to the mind. If we consider the effect as such, it is intirely passive, and is produced by the cause, whether it will or not; and this suggests to us the idea of necessity, which denotes a circumstance or quality of the existence of a thing, when considered as what could not but exist. But the nature of the cause is very different; as such, it is independent, it is not acted upon, but acts itself upon the effect; and therefore, in this view, we discover a quality or circumstance opposite to that necessity which is observed in the effect. And thus we acquire the proper idea of liberty in considering the beginning of action, or the first exertion of active power.

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WHEN we observe the movements of a mere machine, these appear to be necessary; that is, they unavoidably take place in consequence of the action of some proper cause; and thus this necessity is plainly relative to something different from the machine, and upon which all its movements entirely depend. But the action of the cause is of a different nature; there is nothing prior to it, upon which it can depend; the cause in its first action is purely simple and original; we cannot go a step beyond it to connect it with any thing prior to it, otherwise such thing would be the cause, and the other would be only an effect, and part of the supposed machine.

THUS we have the idea of necessity from the manner of the existence of an effect; but the idea of liberty arises from the original exertion of active power,
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which is of a nature intirely opposite to the first.

THE idea of liberty, therefore, has a source as certain and clear in the nature of things, as that of necessity, and which is also prior to it in the order of nature. Thus, when we take a simple view of the origin of these different ideas of liberty and necessity, there appears to be as just a foundation for the one as for the other; and also, that the one is placed in a direct opposition to the other. One should imagine, therefore, that it was impossible to confound these two ideas, or rather to sink the idea of liberty into that of necessity. But the circumstance which has occasioned such endless dispute in this matter seems to be, that though we are intuitively certain, that there must be a power in some being, by the exertion of which it is enabled

abled to produce a particular effect; yet the precise manner of its operation, and how it begins action, is utterly unknown to us: We are, however, without duly adverting to this, very apt to form conjectures concerning the requisites and manner of action, and even to convert these conjectures into settled principles. And it is the more difficult to terminate disputes arising upon this subject, as the parties engaged in them are equally ignorant of the true nature of causation.

THE great argument for absolute necessity, to the total exclusion of liberty, made use of by Mr Leibnitz and other ingenious writers who have adhered in general to his opinion, arises from the following consideration: That a being supposed to be indued with active power, cannot begin to exert that power
without

without some view or design, some motive or sufficient reason; and when such sufficient reason or motive occurs, the action must unavoidably follow. These things they affirm are so clear and evident, as that they cannot be controverted. And thus they make the beginning of action a necessary consequence of something prior to it, and would thereby take away the liberty of action altogether, and make it a link of a certain chain of events essentially connected together. And further, by having recourse to a preceeding reason, as the cause and motive of that which is immediately connected with the action, and so on without end, they are obliged to make the supposed chain infinite and eternal too.

WE shall now endeavour shortly to examine and analyse this so much boasted argument.

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THAT a being capable of beginning motion, or any action whatever, cannot do so without designing it, must certainly be allowed. This we have endeavoured to demonstrate formerly. And indeed, it is not conceivable how any action can begin by chance, and without any intention of the agent. And it may further be allowed, that there must be some motive or view of good which determines the agent to act or not, to do this or the contrary: For an agent may be indifferent as to a particular species of action; but may yet prefer action to rest. The great moment of the present controversy seems therefore to turn upon this point, Whether the motive previous to the action is necessarily connected with the action, and such as the agent cannot resist? or whether the motive is only of that nature as to influence

fluence the agent, but not necessarily, and so as to deprive him altogether of a power to resist it? Before we examine this point particularly, it may be observed, that the true resolution of it depends upon the perfect knowledge of the nature of causation, which, as we have not, we ought to be modest and cautious in all our reasonings and decisions in relation to it.

BUT let us try this matter by placing it in the several lights in which we are capable to perceive it. It will not surely be said to be a self-evident proposition, that the influence of a motive is necessary and irresistible, even when the agent gives way to it. Necessity is so strong and overbearing, according to our ideas of it, that it cannot admit of various degrees; for a less degree of necessity would be no necessity at all; whereas we are
conscious

conscious that the influence of a motive admits of all possible degrees, some indeed so low, as hardly to be sensible at all. It is in consequence of this, that the mind is capable of deliberation; even when a motive is present, it does not immediately comply with its suggestion, but suspends action till it has duly examined its importance; and if it is satisfied of that, then it proceeds to exert its active power, in such a way, however, as to be conscious of liberty, and that it does not suffer any irresistible determination.

It may be questioned, whether any motive can be so strong as to produce an absolute necessity? But, without entering into any unnecessary dispute, it may be justly affirmed, that the motives upon which men commonly act, are of a far inferior nature, nay, often
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so weak as hardly to be felt at all; to affirm then, that this influence is necessary, seems plainly to contradict the full and immediate conviction of the mind. When a man throws a stone out of his hand, its motion is necessary, and the stone cannot resist the power impelling it; but the action of the person who throws the stone appears in a very different light, and we discover nothing without the person as the cause of this action.

BUT it will be said, that there is a preceeding motive, in consequence of which the person performs the action. Be it so, yet it never can be shown or allowed that the consequence is necessary.

LET us examine the nature of a motive; it is surely not an active being, and cannot be an efficient cause; it is nothing

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but a quality, or mode of such a being; and it is the being itself that acts, which it could not be said to do if it was considered only as an instrument acted upon by one of its own modes. Be it allowed, that a motive is necessary in order to action; so also is thought; but neither of these is the proper cause of action: for they may both take place where there is no power to act at all. They can only be considered as requisites in an active being, in order to the exertion of its inherent power; a quality very different from these requisites, and in consequence of which alone it can act, as has already been observed.

OUR imperfect knowledge of the nature of causation, seems to be the occasion of the perpetuated disputes in this matter. The view, however, above exhibited of the beginning of action, appears

pears to be the most simple, natural, and
 intelligible. It intirely appropriates the
 principle of action (than which nothing
 can appear more simple) to the nature
 of the active being itself: Whereas the
 contrary opinion moves every wheel of
 Nature and of Providence, and carries
 us through the interminable extent of
 immensity and eternity, before any one
 single action can take place: For it is to
 be observed, that those who contend for
 the necessary influence of motives,
 when they are desired to account for
 the motive immediately preceeding an
 action, they are obliged to have re-
 course still to an anterior motive, by
 means of which the last was produced;
 and they can stop at no privileged mo-
 tive; but are forced to have recourse to an
 infinite series of events bound together
 in an endless chain: For, if we should
 arrive at a motive which had no other
 motive

motive prior to it, then this motive must have been produced without the assistance of any preceeding one; which would be altogether inconsistent with the hypothesis of the necessitarians.

THESE philosophers, in reality, when they require a cause of every thing; yet, by their manner of reasoning, oblige us to conclude, that there cannot be a cause for any thing at all. In their supposed infinite chain of causes and effects, or rather of different events necessarily connected, we are led from one thing to another in order to arrive at the true and proper cause of all; but at this we are not allowed to arrive, because it would destroy their argument; therefore, all the links of the chain are but mere necessary effects, which yet neither have nor can have any real cause at all. In reality, an infinite series of different events,

vents, is a downright absurdity and contradiction. Number and infinite are incompatible: Number is made up of units; but what is infinite cannot consist of finite parts, and excludes number altogether. This pretended demonstration of the necessitarians is therefore a very unfortunate one. Before it can convince us, we must understand it; and in order to understand it, we must view it in its full extent. But then it takes such a boundless flight into immensity and eternity, that we not only soon lose sight of it, but turn so giddy in the pursuit of it, that we are apt to lose sight of every thing else.

BUT this intricate subject is still perplexed by a distinction which is made of necessity, into what is called *moral* and *physical*. It is allowed, that physical necessity is not applicable to an efficient cause;

cause; but at the same time, it is contended, that moral necessity must be so applied. It will be necessary therefore to examine this distinction with some attention.

THOSE who contend for moral, in contradistinction to physical necessity, build their whole argument upon an erroneous notion they have formed with regard to the influence of motives. They alledge, that an intelligent and active being cannot begin action without some view or motive exciting to act: And they further affirm, that the motive, in consequence of which action takes place, cannot be resisted; but that an intelligent and active being, under the influence of such motive, is determined by an absolute necessity to begin action. This last proposition is certainly not self-evident; and therefore must
require

require a proof. It is not self-evident; for it is very easy to conceive, that an active being might have resisted the motive of action; and that therefore, when it gives way to it, it is not determined so to do by an absolute and fatal necessity. And it is so far from being capable of proof, that the contrary must appear evident from every view we are capable to take of the matter.

IN reality, the distinction betwixt moral and physical necessity, upon which the necessitarians would found their reasoning, appears to be but a nominal, and not a real distinction: For, if moral necessity be as absolute and irresistible as physical necessity, it will be impossible to say in what sense an active being is not under physical necessity; or, in other words, is naturally free in the exertion of its power; and is yet, at the same time, under

der an absolute and irresistible moral necessity, which must totally deprive it of its freedom in every view we can take of that quality. It is vain therefore to hope for any advantage from a distinction which it is impossible to explain, or make common sense of.

BUT let us consider this matter in another view : If an intelligent and active being cannot exert the power of acting without being necessarily determined thereto, by the irresistible influence of some particular motive, this lands us in a palpable contradiction, as it totally confounds the ideas of action and passion : For that being which is necessarily and irresistibly determined in its operation, cannot with any propriety be said to act ; it is at best but an instrument, and acted upon by another ; and in the present case, by the motive whose
influence

influence is supposed to produce an absolute necessity. The motive therefore can only be considered as the proper efficient cause; and the being necessarily influenced by the motive can be considered as nothing else but an instrument by means of which the particular effect is produced. But it is evident that nothing can be more absurd than such a conclusion: For, to ascribe proper action, or the exertion of power, to the motive, and take it away from that being itself of which the motive is but an accidental mode or quality, is totally repugnant to our clearest ideas: For it is certainly most absurd to consider that being which still continues to exist, and to possess all the requisites of action, as a mere passive instrument, whilst we derive the true origin and exertion of power from what is but a transitory mode of such a being. If this argu-

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ment needed any illustration, we might discover its force in the clearest manner, by applying it to the nature of that Being who is in himself the most simple, and the most perfect, that is, the Deity.

THAT GOD always acts with design, or from just views and motives, must certainly be admitted. It must also be admitted, that the motives of action in the Deity are always conformable to the essential and unchangeable perfections of his nature, and that he cannot act otherways than as justice and goodness shall direct. He is not, however, upon this account, less free in his actions, because he possesses within his own nature all the principles of action, and is absolutely independent upon any other being. If we could suppose God to act capriciously, such a capricious action surely would not indicate a greater degree

gree of liberty than a just and wise one; for liberty does not depend upon the nature of the action, but upon the manner of it, and the principle from which it flows.

THE power of God, as well as his other perfections, is indeed necessary and eternal; but the action or exertion of this power is temporary and transient; and it is here only where liberty can be discovered. Every being must indeed act according to its nature; and therefore there must be the greatest constancy in the operations of the Deity, because of all natures he is the most unchangeable. But surely, it would be absurd to infer from this, that God had less liberty than any other being. His actions flow intirely from himself; he is the proper cause of them, as he possesses in himself all the principles of action in
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the most independent manner : His actions indeed must be just and good, because he is so himself ; but they must also be free, because it is God himself alone that acts in a manner the most independent imaginable.

FROM the foregoing reflections, we may discover the justness of an observation which Seneca makes upon this subject. He observes, in his first book of natural questions, that God is always necessarily pleased with what is best : And he adds, “ Nec ob hoc minus liber ac potens est ; ipse enim est necessitas sua.” God himself is the principle of this necessity ; and therefore it cannot in the least derogate from his power and liberty : For though he cannot do but what is best ; yet, as his actions only flow from his own nature and perfections, he is, in the most perfect

fect sense of the word, the proper cause and author of them; and consequently must be free.

BUT, leaving these more abstruse reasonings, let us now proceed to consider the matter in a more simple and obvious point of light; let us suppose the case of two equipollent motives of action.

THE necessitarians, in explaining such a case, are greatly embarrassed: They are either obliged to say, that no such case can exist; or, if it did, that an intelligent being could not act at all. With regard to the first, to assert that two motives of action, in every respect equal, cannot be presented to the mind at the same time, is an affirmation that has not the least reason to support it. The idea of equality is as obvious, and as
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just as that of inequality, and where-
ever the one can be applied, so may the
other; and though it should happen in
fact, that no two things of the same kind
are precisely equal; yet this would not
in the least affect the general argument:
For, admitting that no two bodies could
be found in nature exactly equal; yet
the reasonings of the mathematicians
upon any supposed equality or inequality
of bodies, would not be the less just and
conclusive. The necessitarians are there-
fore forced to entrench themselves in
the other member of the dilemma, and
to maintain, That if two motives of
action were entirely equal, the agent
could not act all. As no good reason
can be given for so bold an assertion; so,
if we give but the slightest attention to
it, it must appear intirely false: For, let
us suppose that there are two objects of
happiness presented to the mind, intirely
equal

equal with respect to every circumstance, and each of them easily to be attained, must the attainment of any one of them be impossible, because of that circumstance of equality? No surely; a general desire of happiness is a sufficient principle of action, which can never be disappointed, for that reason, that it may be easily gratified in two different ways.

OF this we must be intirely satisfied from the immediate conscioufness we have of the active powers of the mind; nay, let us suppose several objects of action equally indifferent, and none of them of sufficient force to influence the mind, the very pleasure of action alone may have this effect; and when thus a sufficient motive of action exists, the mind will easily determine itself in the preference of any one of the supposed equal species or objects of action. And thus we clearly

ly perceive how the mind acts, even when there is no prevailing motive to engage it ; and we must also be satisfied, that it acts in the same manner, that is, freely, even when under the influence of such motive.

THE necessitarians sometimes appeal to fact in proof of the truth of their doctrine, and alledge, that the conduct and actions of men are a necessary consequence of their particular character and prevailing passions; and if the last are known, the first may be determined with great certainty. But this still brings us back to the former question, Whether the connection betwixt the conduct and passions of men is necessary, or only natural? That particular passions will influence a man's actions, is what none will deny; but then this influence is not necessary and irresistible:

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This must appear from the preceeding abstract reasonings, and is even confirmed from fact and observation: For, it must be allowed, that there are many instances of men who have subdued intirely the strongest natural passions, by steadily pursuing a conduct contrary to what these would have led them to; and there is hardly any man who, upon some occasions at least, does not resist his most favourite passion; so that, if experience proves a natural connection betwixt the character and the conduct, it proves at the same time, that that connection is not necessary; and though it may be the foundation of a very probable conjecture, yet it never can support a certain conclusion.

It has already been observed, that the arguments urged by the necessitarians in favour of their peculiar doctrine,

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are not pointed against any particular species of beings, but are drawn from the nature of the thing, and tend to persuade us, that liberty is in itself a thing impossible; and consequently, according to their opinion, the Supreme Being himself can have no liberty, but must be subjected to the fatal influence of the same absolute necessity. This consequence of itself might have sufficiently exposed the absurdity of the doctrine: For an Almighty Being, possessing in his own nature all the principles of action, and liable to no foreign influence whatever, must begin action in the most free and independent manner imaginable. Our ideas of the Deity seem to be no where clearer than in this matter; and though God will act always agreeably to his own perfections; yet still his acting is simple, absolute, and totally from himself, and his power is the
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more perfect and divine, that it intirely agrees with his other attributes. But though freedom must certainly be allowed to belong to the Deity, it may still be a question, whether man is a free agent or not. However this may be determined, yet the greatest part of the difficulty is overcome, if we are satisfied that liberty is a possible thing; and in order to know whether it is applicable to men, it only remains to examine facts, and to consider the real qualities of human actions.

THIS indeed is not so much our present purpose; however, we may shortly observe, that from the consciousness we have of our own actions, we clearly distinguish them from the mere movements of a machine, in respect of which the machine is purely passive.

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ALL the qualities of human actions correspond to the idea of liberty : Thus they are blameable or praise-worthy, morally good or evil, imputable, and consequently objects of reward and punishment : Hence man becomes a proper subject of moral government ; and of the propriety of all these things we have a natural and immediate sense. Thus also our researches, deliberations, judgments, reasonings, and, in a word, the whole system of the human mind, has a manifest reference to liberty, without which it is not to be understood or accounted for.

LET us once for all reflect but a little upon what passes in the mind during the act of deliberating. Let us suppose, for instance, that finding ourselves uneasy under a state of indolence and inactivity, we resolve upon some exercise
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or other, but altogether in doubt what kind of exercise or action to prefer. In this case we carefully examine the several species of action which may occur, and compare them together; and we often continue this deliberation a considerable time before we make an election. It is supposed that the mind is resolved upon action, and would prefer the most indifferent one to a state of indolence and rest. The several species of action which we examine must therefore appear equal, otherways we could no longer deliberate, according to the opinion of the necessitarians, though, at the same time, they are not very willing to admit of such equality; but though they should be supposed equal when presented to the mind at the same time; yet, as they take place successively, the first in order of time, from that very circumstance, should prevail.

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BUT it would be endless to pursue all the precarious suppositions which the necessitarians might make in order to render the mind a mere machine. The very consciousness of what passes in the mind whilst we deliberate affords a stronger evidence than a thousand arguments. We often resist motives when there is no real reason for so doing; and we are conscious, whilst we deliberate, that the mind holds the scales, and weighs and balances the force of the opposite motives, and then forms a final resolution with ease and with authority. It is not therefore a mere passive subject, the sport of contrary motives, which throw it into a giddy dance in an irresistible manner. No; we feel, whilst we deliberate, a secret power in the mind over the motives which may be presented to it, in virtue of which it suspends their influence; and when it yields to any
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of them, it is still with this consciousness, that it could have resisted them; and that therefore the mind itself is properly the agent and by no means the motive.

It is indeed an inquiry too high for us to examine, in what manner, or to what degree, the power of acting is conferred upon us; we must be satisfied in general to know, that it is so from its unquestionable effects. It must, at the same time be allowed, that man, though a free, is yet a dependent and mixed being. He must depend upon his Supreme Creator for the exercise of his freedom; and also, in his sensations, desires, and affections, and in many other respects, he finds himself in a great measure passive. Such being the nature of the human mind, many difficult questions have been started in relation to
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the necessary concurrence of God, and the extent and degree of human liberty; and speculative men have often gone into opposite extremes, and that sometimes in a dogmatical manner: But, if we reflect on the imperfect condition of man, and the weakness of the human faculties, and are properly initiated in the principles of academical philosophy, we shall find reason to be modest and cautious in our decisions anent matters so abstruse and remote, and to rest satisfied with very general notions, instead of positive and particular opinions. Waving therefore such high debates, we shall proceed in our general examination of the nature of liberty, or the power of acting.

AN ingenious writer (the author of the *Essays of the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*), brings his argument

ment in support of necessity within the following narrow compass: "The preceding reasoning," says he, "may perhaps make a stronger impression by being reduced to a short argument, after this manner. No man can be conceived to act without some principle leading him to action. All our principles of action resolve into desires and aversions; for nothing can prompt us to move or exert ourselves in any shape but what presents some object to be pursued or avoided. A motive is an object so operating upon the mind as to produce either desire or aversion. Now, liberty, as opposite to moral necessity, must signify a power in the mind of acting without or against motives; that is to say, a power of acting without any view, purpose, or design, and even acting in contradiction to our own desires and aversions; which power, be-

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“fides that no man was ever consci-
“ous of it, seems to be an absurdity al-
“together inconsistent with a rational
“nature.”

WE shall not enter into a particular analysis of this pretended demonstration, but only make a few general remarks upon it in consequence of our preceeding reasoning. It is not true, that we always act in consequence of a motive; for we may act when motives are equal. This our author candidly admits; he adds indeed, that this case must be extremely rare, and therefore not much to be regarded. But the importance of the observation consists in this, that when in any one plain instance we clearly discover liberty, we justly infer, that it is a natural quality of the agent; and therefore that it is to be ascribed to it in other cases that may appear more ambiguous: For, another observation to
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be made is, that when the mind acts from motives, it does not act necessarily, but has a power to resist these motives. This is the great point upon which the present dispute turns; and it appears to be sufficiently illustrated from the preceeding observation; for if, in any instance, the mind can act without propellent motives, we may naturally suppose, that even when such motives take place, its action may resist them; nay, if it was otherways, and that the motive, by an absolute necessity, produced the action of the mind, it would be the greatest impropriety to say, that the mind acted at all: For in this case it must be intirely passive, and can only be considered as an instrument acted upon, and we must search for the proper and efficient cause of the action, either in the motive itself, or we must ascend higher to something preceeding the motive,

motive, till at last we arrive at the true source and origin of the action, where liberty must certainly take place; unless we shall adopt the absurd and contradictory notion of an infinite series.

THE preceeding reasoning must sufficiently demonstrate, that when the mind acts from motives, it is not determined by an absolute necessity; whereas the contrary opinion not only involves us in the grossest absurdities, but is a mere assertion without any evidence to support it: For, when an action flows from a motive, we are by no means obliged to admit, that it flows necessarily from it. The natural effect of an action is indeed necessary; but the proper cause of it must be free, otherways it cannot with propriety be said to act, but must be considered as a mere passive instrument. We shall only observe further, with regard
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to the reasoning of the author we have mentioned, that he considers liberty as a power of acting without any view or design; but this is an improper representation of the matter: For the question is not properly, whether the mind acts with any design or motive, which must be allowed, at least, to be commonly the case? but whether that design or motive necessarily determines the mind to act? Which must be denied, otherways the mind could not be said to act at all: And whereas he says, to act without a motive, is inconsistent with a rational nature; this is losing sight of the true state of the question, which is not so much, whether the mind can act without a motive? as whether such motive necessarily determines the mind? And, if this last should be said, it would seem indeed to be inconsistent with a rational nature: For the motive determining

mining the mind, by an absolute necessity, to action, (if this term can with any propriety be used), must prevent the calm and speculative principle of reason from reflecting upon the nature of the action, and the genuine consequences of it.

It seems unnecessary to pursue this abstruse subject any further; for, if any doubt should still remain with regard to the reality of liberty, this must be entirely owing to the imperfection of our ideas in relation to the first exertion of power; an imperfection which will ever remain, so long as our faculties continue in their present state. However, if we leave these metaphysical and subtle speculations, and form our opinions upon the common occurrences of life, and those ideas which are most obvious and familiar, we can never hesitate

tate a moment in determining whether we are free agents, or mere passive machines. The idea of liberty entirely tallies with every thing that falls under our experience, and its propriety is conspicuous in relation to the universal government of God, and also to every species of human government.

It must not, however, be dissembled, that there are objections brought against liberty too material to be overlooked; and yet drawn from such remote and hidden sources, as that they are to be examined with great modesty and caution : These sources are the Divine Prescience, and Divine Decrees.

It is alledged, that liberty is altogether inconsistent with the Divine prescience; and indeed this opinion has appeared in so strong a light, that it has
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forced philosophers and divines into opposite extremes, whilst some chose to take away liberty, and others to overthrow the Divine prescience; yet these perhaps may be reconciled, and the difficulty may arise not from the real inconsistency betwixt the things themselves, but from the great imperfection of our ideas.

WHAT may be the true foundation of the Divine prescience, we cannot pretend to tell. Setting revelation aside, we have indeed no other means of knowing future events, but from the connection of cause and effect, and that necessary order of things which is thereby established. But it would surely be the highest presumption in us to circumscribe the Divine knowledge by the scanty model of our very weak faculties. It may be observed with regard
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to all actions and events whatever, which really take place, that it may be affirmed of them from all eternity that they would exist. And this is true not only with regard to those events which are the necessary effects of irresistible causes, but also of the beginning of action itself, or of the first and free exertion of active power, independent of any preceeding cause: And thus there is a difference betwixt certainty and necessity, founded in the nature of things. Necessity is a quality that can only be applied to an event which exists in consequence of the irresistible influence of a proper cause; but certainty is applicable not only to such event, but also to the action of the cause itself, however free that may be supposed to be. This distinction is taken notice of by Cicero in his book *De Fato*, in the following words: "Licet enim Epicuro, con-

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“cedenti omne enunciatum aut verum,
 “aut falsum esse, non vereri, ne omnia
 “fato fieri sit necesse : non enim æternis
 “causis naturæ necessitate manantibus
 “verum est id, quod ita enuntiatur.
 “Descendit in Academiam Carneades:
 “nec tamen sine causis: sed interest in-
 “ter causas fortuito antegressas, et in-
 “ter causas cohibentes in se efficientiam
 “naturalem.”

Now, though the necessity arising
 from a series of causes and effects, is a-
 lone what can enable us to look into fu-
 turity; yet the certainty, even from all
 eternity, of the existence of an event,
 though the immediate effect of liberty,
 and no part of a necessary concatenation
 of things, may be a sufficient foundation
 for the Divine prescience. It is true, we
 cannot form any particular idea of this
 matter; but we ought to remember,
 that

that the Divine knowledge is infinitely superior to ours, both in kind and degree; besides, the other perfections of God are as inscrutable to us.

CAN we explain God's eternal existence, which seems to unite past, present, and to come, and thereby to render future events the objects of his knowledge, as well as those that are past? Can we conceive creative power, or how a thing is brought to existence from nothing? Yet these perfections we must necessarily allow to the Deity, however imperfect our ideas of them may be. We need not then be surpris'd if the Divine knowledge is too great an object for our capacity, which is infinitely disproportioned to the Divine perfections.

WE must be contented to have pointed out certainty as the foundation of the
Divine

Divine knowledge in relation to future events of whatever kind. And though we are not able to connect these; yet this is at least taking one step, which we are not even able to do with regard to creative power. Indeed, if the imperfection of our ideas is a just objection to the Divine prescience, we must, for the same reason, take away all the other perfections of God at once.

BUT let us further proceed to consider the Decrees of God; and in this respect the difficulty will appear to be greatly increased. As all things have proceeded from God, nothing appears more reasonable than to consider them as intirely subjected to his sovereign will and power; yet this opinion seems absolutely to exclude liberty, not only as it creates a difficulty in reconciling it with the Divine decrees, but as it
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places the one in a direct opposition to the other. This difficulty may, however, be resolvable into the weakness and imperfection of our minds. The Divine prescience may be a foundation for the Divine decrees, which must be viewed in a very different light as they relate to free agents, and as they relate to beings intirely passive and inert; and though we cannot pretend to see this difference in a true and proper light; yet this is nothing uncommon in matters so arduous and sublime.

THE contemplation of the immensity, eternity, and the other perfections of God, rather confounds and astonishes than enlightens our minds. And that is often truest which we are ready to pronounce impossible. It becomes us, therefore, to be modest, and to suppose
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there may be a method of explaining the Divine decrees so as to reconcile them with liberty, our ignorance of which ought not at all to surprize us.

MANKIND, from the earliest ages, according to their loose and general notions, (and these are all we can have in this matter,) allowed both of decrees and liberty. Thus Homer, who wrote according the prevailing opinions, in the beginning of the first book of the Iliad, affirms, that all things (having in his view even the free actions of men) were accomplished by the will of Jupiter.

Such was the soveraign will, and such the doom
of Jove.

THE same great poet as strenuously asserts liberty by the authority of Jupiter himself; towards the beginning of the
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Odyſſey, he introduces Jupiter ſpeaking in the following manner.

Perverſe mankind, whoſe will's created free,
Charge all their woes on abſolute decree;
All to the dooming gods their guilt tranſlate,
And follies are miſcall'd the crimes of fate.

BUT, whatever opinion we may form to ourſelves of the Divine decrees, we are not to imagine that theſe can lay any improper reſtraint upon the Divine conduct, or obſtruct what is fitteſt and beſt to be done in any circumſtances; for this would be making the decrees of God ſuperior to God himſelf, and repugnant to his moral character and perfections. As therefore the government of God is moral, we need not be afraid that the decrees of God will, in any caſe, obſtruct any fit or proper moral effect. Indeed, in matters ſo ſublime and abſtruſe, modeſty is our trueſt wiſdom;

wisdom; and it is safer to confess our ignorance, than rashly to embrace any particular opinion, which can hardly fail to be erroneous: Ignorance in such a case is more excusable than error, which is generally accompanied with some degree of presumption.

INSTEAD, therefore, of pursuing a subject so very difficult and abstruse, it may be of much greater use and benefit to us, to consider the natural tendency and consequences of the different opinions of liberty and necessity.

IF we shall think that we are free, and that we have within ourselves the proper principles of action, we must at the same time be sensible, that our happiness depends in a great measure upon ourselves; for happiness or misery must, by the invariable order of nature, be the fruit

fruit of our own doings: If we shall then have this persuasion, that we have a real power over our own conduct, such persuasion will engage us in the most effectual manner to prefer such conduct as leads to happiness; and consequently we will exert every power of the soul in the constant pursuit of virtue, than which nothing can more effectually promote the happiness of others, as well as that of ourselves.

BUT, on the other hand, if we shall embrace the opinion of necessity, then we must consider ourselves as mere machines only, acted upon, but without any power of action. Such opinion must relax all the vigour of the soul, must damp and discourage every generous emotion of the mind, and indeed, tend to reduce us to a state of total in-

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difference and stupidity; than which nothing can be more pernicious to society as well as to the individual.

THESE very different consequences of the opposite doctrines of liberty and necessity, may have no small weight in determining upon what side the truth lies; for, as liberty entirely tallies with the whole system of the human mind, particularly with the most important quality of virtue; it is therefore naturally applicable to man; whereas, necessity being the reverse of all this, is inconsistent with all our ideas of a rational and active being, and can only be applied to a mere passive machine. And these are the conclusions which we naturally make, when we are freed from the influence of certain abstruse speculations which we are
not

not able to comprehend, and which totally confound the distinction betwixt action and passion, betwixt the voluntary operations of an intelligent agent, and the necessary movements of a mere machine; a distinction universally allowed by the common sense of mankind.

THE END.

E R R A T A.

- P. 89. l. 12. For *virtues*, read *vortices*.
 P. 105. l. antepen. For *single*, read *simple*.
 P. 113. l. antepen. For *compound*, read *component*.
 P. 119. l. 9. For *compound*, read *component*.



